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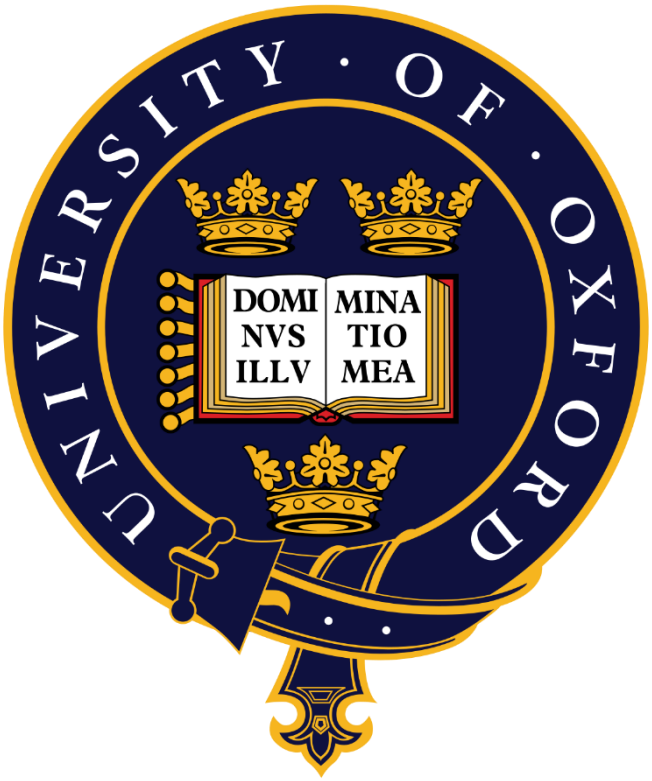

How should we perceive the female rebel identity of enslaved women in Jamaica and Barbados, c.1760-1816?

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Master of Studies in Global and Imperial History

Trinity Term, 2024

Word Count: 14,880

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr Meleisa Ono-George of The Queen's College, University of Oxford who has supported me immensely throughout this project. Furthermore, I am indebted to the Faculty of History Graduate Studies Fund and the Pembroke College Dean of Graduates Fund for their generous assistance with facilitating my research. I also give special thanks to the Bodleian Libraries at University of Oxford, Senate House Library at University of London, and The National Archives in Kew Gardens, London along with the community at the Race and Resistance research hub at The Oxford Research Centre for Humanities (TORCH). Lastly, I cannot forget my mum and dad who have in person and on FaceTime kept my spirits high during this whole process.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

BMBG – Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette

BRBML – Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

GA – Gloucestershire Archives

SHL – Senate House Library

TNA – The National Archives

USPG – United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts

Abstract

This dissertation intends to demonstrate that the female rebel identity of enslaved women in Jamaica and Barbados during this time should be perceived as one defined by linguistic dexterity, attempted assertions of self-autonomy and collective liberation, maintaining intergenerational kinship links and knowing African culture and traditions. By qualifying this identity as multidimensional and fundamental to the enslaved women who engaged in rebellious activities, I am not only reading against the archival grain of Eurocentric contemporary sources, but also engaging in our own historical revisionism by reassessing the silence, and thus, the epistemic violence of the archives. In doing so, observations of contemporary written items from mostly European authors, direct oral histories of enslaved women, and more unorthodox locations of female rebel identity's manifestation within places like the neo-slave narrative genre, song and dance performances, and material culture will also be explored. Likewise, this dissertation places more attention on the unsaid which offers greater contextualisation for recorded instances of rebellion and contributes further consideration to the categorisations of rebellious enslaved women which have emerged in Caribbean historiography.[1] The last fifty years witnessed the rapid development of Caribbean women's history as more scholars have searched for alternative source bases and alternative perspectives whilst engaging in feminist frameworks which contrasts with earlier imperialist narratives of Caribbean history.[2] Subsequently, the following chapters will continue this tradition of historical revisionism and intersectionality with the aspects of race, gender, enslavement, and resistance, to build on current historiography pertaining to enslaved women in Jamaica and Barbados from the transformative period of 1760-1816.

[1] B. Bush, ''Sable venus', 'she devil' or 'drudge'? British slavery and the 'fabulous fiction' of black women's identities, c. 1650–1838', *Women's History Review,* Vol 9: 4, (2000), pp.761-789; L.M. Mair, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery,* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1975), pp.1-15

[2] B Brereton, 'Women and Gender in Caribbean (English-speaking) Historiography: Sources and Methods', *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 7 (2013), pp.1-18

Introduction

Within histories of slavery in the Anglophone Caribbean, figures like Nanny of the Maroons and Queen Cubah are some of the only mentions of individual female leaders in accounts of mass revolts and rebellions. However, instances of resistance by enslaved women, as individuals and groups, also helps provide a more robust and complex picture of both survival during the Middle Passage and on the plantation and importantly, what it meant to be a rebel woman. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars like Elsa Goveia and Lucille Marthuin Mair were two of the first Caribbean academics to showcase enslaved women as active agents of liberation and mitigating slave society.[3] For instance, Mair argues that enslaved women were 'vital to Black Jamaica's survival' due to their central position within communities as conveyors of kinship and daily modes of practical and verbal resistance like insults and absenteeism.[4] Combined with the latter works of those like Hilary Beckles and Barbara Bush from the late 1980s to early 2000s, they have been immensely helpful for establishing a core understanding of what women's resistance and rebellion entailed and strongly situated enslaved women in narratives of resistance and collective revolt.[5] Beckles was one of the first Caribbeanists to apply a gender history paradigm to Caribbean historical scholarship in his 1989 monograph *Natural Rebels* which considered how manifestations of gender expectations and associated responsibilities impacted our understanding of resistant enslaved women which he has since developed on in latter works.[6]

This dissertation intends to challenge and enhance the existing contentions surrounding perceptions of the female rebel identity of enslaved women in Jamaica and Barbados from 1760-1816 located within the Caribbean women's historiography.

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[3] Mair, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery*, pp.2-15; B.L. Moore, 'Introduction', in B.L. Moore, B.W. Higman, C. Campbell, and P. Bryan (eds.) *Slavery, Freedom, and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society* (Kingston, Jamaica; 1989), pp.x-xi

[4] L.M. Mair; H. McD Beckles and V.A. Shepherd (eds), *Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844*, (Kingston, 2006), pp.234-40

[5] H. McD Beckles, *Centering Woman: Gender discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Kingston, Jamaica: 1999), pp.xxi-xxii; B. Bush, 'From Slavery to Freedom: Black Women, Cultural Resistance and Identity in Caribbean Plantation Society.' *History and histories in the Caribbean* (2001), pp.128-131

[6] H. McD Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados,* (London, 1989), pp.153-76; H. McD Beckles, 'Freeing slavery: gender paradigms in the social history of Caribbean slavery', pp.197-231

The first chapter explores how language was co-opted into the female rebel identity of enslaved women especially since it was often used as a means of self-defence and mockery against planters and overseers. This chapter will also focus on how standard English and creolised languages, in spoken and written form, were deployed by enslaved women to empower themselves in a range of situations, from enhancing their disguises as runaways to launching legal petitions against former masters. The second chapter discusses kinship which as argued by Stella Dadzie was instrumental in maintaining the Afrocentric enclave.[7] The volatility of kinship because of frequent sales and separations in Caribbean slavery mean that rebel enslaved women did not just possess kinship links within the plantation space. Kinship manifested across rural and urban spaces via motherhood, sisterhood, alliances, and sexual relationships used to justify their occasions of resistance, negotiate better social conditions for themselves and their families, and be pillars of influence within enslaved communities. Finally, in chapter three, there will be a separate consideration of culture, though one weaved throughout the previous chapters, which traces how the perseverance of African traditions and their creolisation in Jamaica and Barbados respectively informed methods of resistance among rebel women. More specifically, this chapter will explore modes of religious expression, dress, and performances through song and dance, cultural expressions which are often ignored in wider discussions of resistance and enslaved women's lives, as expressions of female rebel identity.[8]

This dissertation utilises a theoretical approach by historians working on enslaved women's histories and epistemological problems of the archives. Specifically, scholars like Marisa Fuentes, Henrice Altink and Barbara Bush have problematised tropes attached to enslaved women in contemporary sources. For example, with increased focus on the intersection between gender, race, sexuality, and coloniality, Fuentes reexamines the 'enslaved body in the archive' and problematises how scholars should comprehend identity and the production of personhood regarding

[7] S. Dadzie, *A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery, & Resistance,* (London, 2020), pp.166-7
[8] H. Altink, 'More than Producers and Reproducers: Jamaican Slave Women's Dance and Song in the 1770s-1830s', *The Society for Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers.* Vol. 1, (2000), pp.1-3

enslaved women against such contentious circumstances.[9] Fuentes complicates the presentation of enslaved women in Barbados like Rachael Pringle-Polgreen, a manumitted Black woman who became a 'hotelier', running a well-known brothel in Bridgetown whose story was publicised by author J.W. Orderson in the 1842 novel *Creoleana*.[10] Pringle-Polgreen's ability to engage in freedom and sustain it monetarily was restricted due to her race, leading her to perpetuate the cycle by purchasing enslaved women for her brothel to ensure her survival but also provided enslaved women the chance to earn some money themselves.[11] Therefore, with Fuentes's approach to evaluating Polgreen in mind, this dissertation will consider the complexities of enslaved women's livelihoods and how their personhoods are understood within a critical lens seem necessary when approaching manifestations of female rebel identity in the following discussion.

Central also to this dissertation is consideration of the influence of epistemic violence in our comprehension of historical narratives and investigating "silences" in the archives. Throughout the following discussion, the dual application of Nicole Aljoe's contention of reading in-between the 'unsaid ' has been heavily incorporated into this work's methodological approach.[12] Aljoe's approach in her consideration of Creole testimonies which considers the unsaid and reconsiders where historians should search for such testimonies in enslaved women's narratives is essentially a response to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question on whether the subaltern figure has a voice.[13] Plus, this dissertation considers Michel-Rolph Trouillot's contention on power dynamics and silences in narratives of slavery by addressing the importance of situational contexts and inferring omitted contextual details in documented instances of resistance and rebellion.[14] Overall, I intend to demonstrate that the female rebel identity of enslaved women Jamaica and Barbados during this time should be perceived as one defined by linguistic dexterity, attempted assertions of self-

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[9] M.J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, 2016), pp.1-5
[10] Ibid., pp.3-7; pp.48-69; J.W. Orderson, *Creoleana* (London, 1842), pp.73-85
[11] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, pp.48-69
[12] N. N., Aljoe, 'Creole Testimonies in Caribbean Women's Slave Narratives', in E. O'Callaghan and T. Watson, (eds) *Caribbean Literature in Transition, 1800–1920.* (Cambridge, 2021), pp.34-51
[13] Ibid., pp.34-51; G.C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader,* (New York, 1994), pp.66-111
[14] M-R Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston, 2015), pp.48-59

autonomy and collective liberation, maintaining intergenerational kinship links and knowledge of African culture and traditions.

I. Verbal Vexation and Personal Protestation: Language

Language was fundamental to consolidating the female rebel identity of the enslaved woman. Specifically, full-body insults, crude language, oral dexterity, written communication, and the telling of oral histories. Since enslaved women engaged in less physical confrontations than their male counterparts, language was a more feasible tool to retaliate against white people, incite disruption and resistance, negotiate better socio-legal conditions for themselves and their kin, or rekindle a sense of identity beyond the confines of enslavement.[15] Therefore, by analysing the written words and spoken dialogue of enslaved women both present in and inferred from letters, slave testimonies, neo-slave narratives, songs, newspapers, and legal documents, this chapter demonstrates that female rebel identity was dependant on enslaved women defying enforced silence and the linguistic policing of white planters and other colonial authorities in Jamaica and Barbados.

The persistence and preservation of the marginalised voice and language in the face of continual oppression is something those studying or interested in this field commend and seek to honour which has also been adopted by writers such as the Guyanese poet Grace Nichols. Whilst this judgement is certainly applicable to the whole of Nichols's 1983 poetry anthology, *I is a long memoried woman*, it is in 'We the Women' which brings Black women's legacies to the forefront. [16] Throughout this short poem, Nichols highlights the invisibility of Black women's labour, their suffering, and overall existence which culminates in the simplistic ignorance of their demise as seen in the final stanza:

'Yet we the women

whose praises go unsung

whose voices go unheard

whose deaths they sweep

aside

[15] Mair, *Historical Study of Women in Jamaica,* pp.235-6
[16] G. Nichols, 'We the Women', in *I is a long memoried woman* (London, 1983), pp.11-2

as easy as dead leaves.'[17]

With the setting ambiguous, the presentation of this generational woe in Nichols's language appears to transcend time and effectively illustrates the continual dilemma of the erasure of Black women's actions, legacies, and of course, words. Hence, Nichols has constructed a resistant neo-slave narrative which highlights the woes of Black women's perceived invisibility and metaphysical subjugation by placing them at the centre of the linguistic formula she deploys through the chant-like repetition of 'we the women.' [18] In turn, somewhat emulating the typical placement of enslaved women as chorus singers in slavery-era songs.[19]

Insults and derogatory language were perhaps the most frequent form of resistance enslaved women engaged in within the Anglophone Caribbean.[20] For enslaved women, argues Diana Paton, 'a language of the body' was also employed.[21] While Paton applies this concept to accusations of abusive language or offensive conduct made against enslaved people from the 1820s onwards, it is still useful for analysing examples from the late eighteenth century. 'Language of the body' involved directing attention to their bodily features during interactions rather than directly insulting white people's character which acted as a form of self-preservation in the face of racism and threats of sexual violence.[22] Most notably, in the song lyrics of 'Hipsaw! My deaa! You no do like-a me!' a Jamaican song transcribed by J.B. Moreton in the 1790s.[23] On the surface, it appears to be an erotic song meant for planters' entertainment at the expense of a presumably young, enslaved woman or group with Hipsaw being a dance form involving the hips making a sawing-like motion.[24] However, the song's lyrics seem to implicitly mock its audience for their lack of mobility to move in this way and diminished ability to provide sexual gratification for the suggested listener

[17] Nichols, 'We the Women', p.12
[18] Ibid., pp.11-2
[19] Altink, 'More than Producers and Reproducers' p.5
[20] M. Ogborn, *The Freedom of Speech: Talk and Slavery in the Anglo-Caribbean World* (Chicago, 2019), pp.4-15
[21] Paton, 'Gender, Language, Violence and Slavery', pp.258-60
[22] Ibid., pp.258-60
[23] J.B. Moreton, *West India customs and manners.* (London, 1793), pp.156-7
[24] Ibid., p.157; F.G. Cassidy, '"Hipsaw" and "John Canoe"', *American Speech* 41/1 (1966), p.46

exemplified in the final line: ‘You no work him like-a me! You no sweet him like-a me![25]

Insulting language and verbal negotiations helped individual enslaved women disrupt labour and negotiate for themselves and kin. Born in Jamaica to an enslaved woman named Rosanna, Jamaican-Scottish abolitionist Robert Wedderburn’s controversial anti-slavery pamphlet and letter collection *The Horrors of Slavery*, shows how his mother and grandmother Talkee Amy utilised insults and derogatory language to taunt the planter James Wedderburn-Colville who was allegedly Robert’s father.[26] Wedderburn recalls the main complaint about his mother was that she was ‘of a violent and rebellious temper’ and as time progressed while under the control of his slave-owning father, her ‘state was so unpleasant’ that he ‘consented to sell her back to Lady Douglas’ in 1762.[27] Unfortunately, readers know almost nothing about the specifics on what encompassed Rosanna’s temper and can only speculate what sorts of insults Rosanna deployed in her unpleasant state. Plus, *Bell’s Life*, the London newspaper where Wedderburn originally published his letter, received a threat of legal action from his white half-brother Andrew Colville who accused Robert of lying about his lineage and his mother’s experiences.[28] Since Robert was separated from his mother aged four and sent to live with Talkee Amy who lived on a separate plantation in Kingston after his removal from the Douglas’s estate, these accounts of Rosanna were likely orally passed down to him.[29] Nonetheless, both men agreed on the existence of her temper which Colville offers slightly more detail about: ‘so violent a temper that she was continually quarrelling with the other servants, and occasioning a disturbance in the house.’ [30] Therefore, even if Wedderburn’s interpretation of Rosanna using bodily insults was hyperbolic, the mentioning of quarrels and disturbances within the planter household insinuates that her verbal interactions disrupted the progress of labour in this space.

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[25] Moreton, *West India customs and manners,* p.157
[26] R. Wedderburn and I McCalman (ed.), *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings by Robert Wedderburn,* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp.45-9
[27] Ibid., pp.47-8
[28] Ibid., pp.52-3
[29] Ibid., p.48-9
[30] Ibid., pp.52-61

Compared to Rosanna, there is direct evidence of Talkee Amy orally insulting Wedderburn-Colville and advocating for better provisions for Robert Wedderburn. Recounting a specific incident, Wedderburn describes how in his only contact with his father, she openly confronted him about deserting Wedderburn and after 'giving her some abusive language, my grandmother called him a mean Scotch rascal.' [31] The fact Amy was wholly undeterred in confronting and insulting Wedderburn-Colville suggests her strengths lay in self-advocacy and being sharp-tongued which evidently influenced her grandson. Moreover, her reputation as a smuggled goods seller in Kingston implies that she possessed some level of social currency that minimised chances of potential repercussions other enslaved women faced for using retaliatory language against white people. [32] However, this sole insult might have been just that since there is no indicator Amy's comment accompanied a threat of violence towards Wedderburn-Colville which would have been taken more seriously by planters, overseers, and colonial authorities. Overall, the behaviour of Rosanna and words of Talkee Amy illustrate how both women mitigated their experiences of slavery with memories of their language are recovered by Wedderburn to promote abolitionism in London and condemn the practices of his slaveholding father.

Usually, strong language accompanied stronger actions when chosen to be used by enslaved women to openly rebel against planters and overseers. Namely, Matthew Gregory Lewis's journal entry of 21 February 1816 demonstrates enslaved women's abusive language which preceded violence that materialised soon after exchanges of words. In this entry, Lewis discusses two incidents in 1811 starting with the premeditated murder and dismemberment of a planter named 'Mr Dunbar' by a group of enslaved people.[33] Following this, he suggests Dunbar's murder inspired an enslaved woman on a separate plantation to rally those around her to attack their own overseer having declared 'come here! Come here! Let us Dunbar him!' after allegedly being criticised for the quality of her fieldwork.[34] For this, Lewis records that

[31] Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery*, p.48-9
[32] Mair, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery,* pp.13-5; *Wedderburn, The Horrors of Slavery*, p.48
[33] M.G. Lewis, *Journal of a West-India Proprietor: Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica,* (London, 1845), pp.181-2
[34] Ibid., pp.182-3

she was promptly executed afterwards. Essentially, this enslaved woman's rage which is depicted by Lewis as resulting from her overseer finding 'fault' in her fieldwork informed pro-slavery advocates' fears over enslaved people rebelling against Jamaican plantocracy.[35]

Lewis's account of the enslaved woman inspired by Dunbar's murder projects the notion that witnessing violent language seemed to amplify the severity of violence, rebellion, and disorderly conduct charges brought against enslaved women. Mair's statistical analysis of 150 criminal cases mentioning enslaved women who appeared at Port Royal Slave courts between 1819-34, most were found guilty on charges of violence or abusive or indecent language.[36] Specifically, almost a third of these charges concerned language offences categorised as consisting of abusive, threatening, or offensive language which were directed against free people.[37] However, certain linguistic practices such as verbal incitements of rebellion were considered separate offence categories. Recounted in the Clarendon Parish court records of 1816, an enslaved woman named Nanny was transported for life for 'rebellious practices of inciting other slaves to rebellion.'[38] Thus, the policing of abusive and resistant language was imperative to ensure the security of Jamaican plantocracy and thus, restricted enslaved women's modes of expressing malcontent.

Oral dexterity was also used by enslaved women in the Caribbean to reinforce their rebel identity. Given Talkee Amy's nickname and reputation, she was orally dexterous to facilitate the needs of her various client base. According to David Trotman, it proved strategically beneficial for enslaved people to adopt linguistic creolisation for advantageous uses and for enslaved women, as a substitute for enacting physical violence.[39] So, the ability to comprehend and use speech in this way minimised chances of capture from overseers and other colonial authorities. Plus, if enslaved women eventually decided to run away, Shauna Sweeney explains that some

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[35] Lewis, *Journal of a West-India Proprietor*, p.183
[36] Mair, *Historical Study of Women in Jamaica*, pp.224-6
[37] Ibid., p.235
[38] 'Clarendon Parish, 1816', in 'Return of Trials of Slaves.' (1814-1818), The National Archives, CO 137/147, fo.23
[39] D.V. Trotman, 'Struggle for Cultural Hegemony', *Crime in Trinidad: Conflict and Control in a Plantation Society, 1838-1900*, (Knoxville, 1986), pp.256-7

economically benefitted from reinventing themselves as stallholders in urban markets.[40] For instance, in an advert of an October 1761 issue of *The Kingston Journal,* an enslaved woman named Angelica who ran away a month prior was described as 'well known in Kingston where she has sold milk for some time part'.[41] Whilst the advert does not explicitly mention Angelica's linguistic aptitude for standard English, evidently she was well acquainted with the markets of Kingston and her previous interactions with others who operated within this space likely helped conceal her status as an enslaved woman.[42]

Moreover, fugitive slave advertisements revealed that runaway enslaved women were depicted as utilising "good" English to enhance their elaborate disguises which happened more frequently towards the eighteenth century's end as enslaved communities increasingly adjusted to becoming orally dexterous. Published in the *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega* in April 1781, Phurah a twenty-year-old woman born in 'Trenton' North America was described as speaking 'remarkable good English, is very black, and dresses in the stile of English servants – it is probable she will change her name and attempt to pass as a free woman.' [43] Phurah was purchased from what is now Trenton, New Jersey in the United States and given the mentioning of her 'remarkable good' English skills as an African American woman implies she was possessed a relatively high level of linguistic mobility.[44] Moreover, the suggestion Phurah would change her name proves that she sought to reinvent her own identity through oral dexterity and dress.[45]

Meanwhile, other enslaved women tried to take advantage of the increasingly contested imperial political climate by attempting to advocate for themselves or remove themselves from enslavement figuratively using the master's tools of

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[40]Trotman, 'Struggle for Cultural Hegemony', p. 231; S.J. Sweeney, 'Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781–1834', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 76/2 (2019), pp.198-205

[41] 'RUNAWAY from the 30th last month,' *The Kingston Journal* 24 October 1761, p.3 col. b

[42] Ibid., p.3 col. b

[43] 'Runaway […] A Negro wench named Phurah.' *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega,* Jamaica, 26 April 1781, p.2 col. c

[44] Ibid., p.2 col c.

[45] Ibid., p.2 col c.; Bush, 'From Slavery to Freedom', pp.128-9

Standard English and colonial legal system in Jamaica and Barbados.[46] The 1778 letter written under the pseudonym 'John Codrington English' about a plantation owned by the Anglican missionary organisation known as the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (USPG) is a curious instance of this.[47] Addressed to Dr Richard Hind, the letter recounts the alleged mismanagement and poor treatment of enslaved people by an unnamed planter on the Codrington plantation in Barbados owned by the USPG.[48] Interestingly, the anonymous sender describes how having experienced the removal of ground provisions, and 'rage and passions' of the planter concerned, a group of enslaved people met with the Society's attorneys to launch a complaint of 'unusual cruelty they received.'[49] Still, the theory that some enslaved women were a part of this complaint due to the extent of the allegations seems more than likely. Subsequently, the collective decision to try and invoke legal action against a planter despite being the least protected social class on the island demonstrates how understanding legal and political precedents which would have often been verbally dictated amongst each other, assisted enslaved people in asserting their, though minimal, socio-legal entitlements.

Verbal comprehension of legal and political precedents arguably constituted oral dexterity as a resistance tactic since it represented the refusal to remain ignorant in the face of enforced illiteracy. After the announcement of the *1807 Abolition Act* which criminalised the shipment of captured Africans from the continent across the empire, this incentivised some groups of enslaved people to rebel throughout the year.[50] In a letter by Jamaica-based planter Simon Taylor to his brother Robert in June, news of the act led to the abandonment of duties, armed revolts, and the destruction of property which seemingly occurred on every estate.[51] Specifically, the

[46] A. Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider*, 3rd Ed., (Milton Keynes, 2019), pp.103-6
[47] Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, USPG C/WIN/BAR 3, item 42. 'Letter and copy from a clergyman who uses a pseudonym John Codrington English (1778)'
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] London, Senate House Library, University of London, ICS120/1/I/43 '31.10.07 to George Hibbert; Negroes think the Abolition Bill will make them free by Christmas', fo.1
[51] London, SHL, University of London, ICS120/1/I/33 'June 1807 to Robert Taylor; Rebellious state of the negroes', fo.1

taking up of ‘swords and conflagration of the negroes’.[52] Of course, readers can only speculate that there were pockets of enslaved women involved in these events due to the scale of sporadic rebelliousness across the island. Simultaneously, some enslaved women decided this was the perfect time to request the manumission of themselves or family members such as Dolly Newton.

From the early nineteenth century, manumission was a popular individual way of attempting to secure freedom in Barbados and Jamaica especially for enslaved women and Dolly utilised not only her socio-legal knowledge, but written language skills to negotiate her claim to freedom.[53] Dolly was a middle-aged enslaved woman from the Newton plantation of Barbados and the letters concerning the case for her own manumission in 1807 suggest that she was instrumental in promoting her own case for freedom in front of colonial authorities.[54] Her personal petition letter sent to Thomas Lane, the absentee co-owner of the plantation, is an important example of how enslaved women petitioned for manumission during this period and the importance of oral dexterity in negotiating terms of release. Importantly, judging by the letter’s structure and style, Dolly wrote it herself and knew basic handwriting in standard English which can be seen by her more rounded, larger letter formations, and occasionally misspelt words. [55] As mentioned by Beckles who briefly investigates notable enslaved women of the Newton estate, Dolly was one of three daughters of Old Doll, an elder who was lauded for producing a huge lineage on the estate with 21 directly related family members recorded in 1796. [56] With the previous plantation owners known as the Newtons absent during the 1780s, some of the management responsibilities fell to Old Doll and her family, including ensuring the health of enslaved people alongside Dolly who was trained in healing and midwifery.[57] Evidently, Old Doll, and her daughters were rewarded with some extra privileges

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[52] SHL, ICS120/1/I/33, fo.1
[53] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* pp.159-61
[54] London, SHL University of London, MS523/651 ‘Barbados. W. Jackson, concerning the manumission of slave Dolly’, (November 25, 1807); London, SHL University of London, MS523/652 ‘Barbados. Dolly Newton, a slave’ (November 26, 1807)
[55] SHL, MS523/652
[56] Beckles, *Natural Rebels* p.159; London, SHL University of London, MS523/288, ‘Sampson Wood [manager in Barbados]. List of and report on negroes at Newton. (1796)’
[57] K. Paugh, ‘A West Indian Midwife’s Tale: The Politics of Childbirth on Newton Plantation’, *The Politics of Reproduction: Race, Medicine, and Fertility in the Age of Abolition*, (Oxford, 2017), pp.138-41

including the ability to cultivate literacy and live “freer” than those outside of the immediate family line.[58]

Dolly confidently asserts that she has the approval of her ‘going mastrs and misses and family’ and her ‘friend [Mr Jackson] who has wrote to you’ and wishes Lane to ‘complete the business.’ [59] Indeed, scholars like Janina Fenigsen suggest that Dolly’s letter evokes some traits of the contemporary Bajan letter writing style used by the white elite especially in deviations such as ‘has wrote to you’ instead of written. [60] Regardless, her language asserted Dolly’s advantageous circumstances of having a more privileged position than her counterparts and her agents of legitimation being absentee planters, which presented a more appealing case for granting manumission that was eventually granted in 1810.[61] Although she went through the so-called legitimate processes to secure her freedom, Dolly’s persistence of communicating her rights to freedom coincided with her aspirations for a less degrading existence which upset the social fabric of contemporary Barbados.

While standard English was sometimes used as a disguise or means of asserting legitimacy over claims to freedom for rebel enslaved women, Creole dialects were the most frequently spoken. Indeed, such language is visualised in arguably the most direct demonstrations of utilising language to reinforce a rebel identity: testimonies of enslaved women from Barbados and Jamaica. Unsurprisingly, Nicole Aljoe’s study of creole testimonies in enslaved Caribbean women’s narratives situates Spivak’s essay as core to her methodological approach by considering that since subaltern figures are located on margins of academic discourse, the manner of their speech might not appear in forms academics are used to seeing. [62] Essentially, not only must the subaltern enslaved woman be acutely searched for, but occasionally, also in ways atypical to evaluating historical narratives of privileged individuals.

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[58] SHL, MS523/288
[59] SHL, MS523/652
[60] Ibid.; J., Fenigsen, ‘“A Broke-up Mirror”: Representing Bajan in Print’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 14/1 (1999), pp.71-2
[61] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* pp.159-60
[62] Aljoe, ‘Creole Testimonies in Caribbean Women’s Slave Narratives’, pp.35-6 ; Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, pp.86-90

Aljoe pays significant attention to the first-person testimonies of two elder enslaved women named Ashy and Sibell whose testimonies are documented by a white Barbadian named John Ford in 1799 along with the narrative of Florence Hall a presumably young, enslaved woman in Jamaica created in 1810. [63] Importantly, all these women were born in West Africa and due to the intimate nature of these personal accounts, she praises them for providing romantic imagery of Africa whilst simultaneously deeply criticising colonial slavery. [64] Ashy's comments are especially disparaging towards Barbados overall as summarised here: 'dis country here dat you call Barbadus – um no good […] my *country* is a boon country, a boon country massah no like yours.' [65] Essentially, she mocks Barbados, and invalidates the legitimacy of its colonial society whilst criticising the Christian God's lack of power and influence compared to that of her indigenous deities. [66] Indeed, Aljoe recognises Ashy's refusal to present a Christianised contemporary representation of Africa contravenes a popular motif in the slave narrative genre often replicated by formerly enslaved men. [67] But what Aljoe omits is the significance of Ashy's opinion being documented by Ford. His transcription deviates from what Kamau Brathwaite defines as contemporary white commentators training by prejudice which endorsed the racist notion of Africans possessing no culture. [68] Specifically, Ford included many allusions to the existence of African culture in a frank way with seemingly no desire to denigrate her perspective and subjugate the information Ashy conveyed to him. However, when considering enslaved women's testimonies, it must be stated that most if not all these testimonies were probably given within the plantation environment and hence, would have inhibited the extent Ashy, Sibell, and Florence could speak without fear of immediate reprimand. Therefore, to mitigate this, narratives of enslaved women typically contained invocations of memory.

The articulation of memories especially those which centred Africa and African countries' indigenous traditions was another way in which enslaved women adopted

[63] Aljoe, 'Creole Testimonies in Caribbean Women's Slave Narratives', pp.41-7
[64] Ibid., p.41
[65] Handler, 'Memoirs of Sibell and Ashy', p.133
[66] Ibid., p.133
[67] Aljoe, 'Creole Testimonies in Caribbean Women's Slave Narratives', pp.40-1; Handler, 'Memoirs of Sibell and Ashy', p.133
[68] K. Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica.* 2nd Ed., (London, 1981), pp.12-3

a female rebel identity. Memory and its significance hold a special place in the construction of oral history in the Caribbean context since it has not only helped in reaffirming historical narratives but also in mythmaking. Sibell and Florence's recounting of their lives prior to arriving in Barbados and Jamaica respectively is a rebellious activity due to their refusal to supress memories of Africa, of their former social statuses, and personhoods despite their enslavement. Sibell's remembrance of her father being a 'great man' and Florence remembering some her childhood 'in the country of Eboe' (now southeastern Nigeria) are snippets of positive memories which have not been wholly suppressed in their consciousnesses. [69]. According to Browne and John Wood Sweet, the handwritten memoir of Florence Hall was likely transcribed and mediated by her owner Robert Johnston in 1810 who eventually inherited two plantations in St Ann's Parish, Jamaica. [70] The start of her memoir explains how she was kidnapped and brought to Jamaica as a child in the late eighteenth century. [71] Although, readers know nothing about Hall's opinions about Jamaica nor are overt expressions of disdain for the colonial society shown, one vital component was retained: her name 'Akeiso'. [72] Indeed, her recollection of Port Royal seems to have been especially traumatic was shortly after her arrival where she lost her name, gaining 'another name – a strange language, and a new master…' [73] Arguably, Hall's memoir represents the other end of the female rebel identity spectrum. Here, she emphasised her African lineage and memories of her childhood in Africa which clearly informed how she saw her own identity: an African woman ripped from her home and forced to absorb a societal hierarchy that perpetually sought to erase her being. Hence, in Florence dictating her memories like Ashy, and Sibell, one observes the refusal to be internally subjugated through the articulation of them which suggested the desire amongst enslaved African women to preserve their connections to the Africa and senses of self-worth even if they were being physically degraded through the system of slavery.

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[69] Handler, 'Memoirs of Sibell and Ashy', p.133; F. Hall, *Memoirs of the Life of Florence Hall* (Jamaica, 1810, p.1

[70] R. Browne and J. Wood Street, 'Florence Hall's "Memoirs": Finding African Women in the Transatlantic Slave Trade', *Slavery & Abolition*, 37/1, (2015), pp.206-10

[71] Hall, *Memoirs of the Life of Florence Hall*, pp.1-2

[72] Ibid., p.4

[73] Ibid., p.4

As shown in the various applications of language by enslaved women demonstrated above, these resistant modes of verbal and written expression enabled enslaved women to ascertain a sense of female rebel identity that was grounded in their refusal to be subjected to total silencing whilst mitigating their enslavement. Contemporary sources like the fugitive slave adverts, slave testimonies, and letters, aptly reveal that verbal communication and occasionally the written word were deployed strategically by resistant enslaved women in often pressurised situations. Likewise, enslaved women's usage of insults, abusive language, oral dexterity, petitioning, and dictation of memories affirms language's importance in perceiving female rebel identity since their deployment represented efforts to retain a sense of personhood and a voice even when it was systematically denied to them.

II. Families Unwound to Relatives Found: Kinship

Physical and psychological resistance to self-degradation through the existence of kinship links greatly influenced enslaved women's female rebel identity since it rejected and inhibited progress of dehumanisation processes which the Trans-Atlantic slave trade relied upon. Although the stability of family units was perpetually compromised because of enforced separations and sales, numerous enslaved women became mothers to children that were not their own. Such arrangements were not without their own physical and psychological challenges including the emotional distress which arose from the mourning of sold, tortured, or deceased kin.[74] Despite this, the presence of mother figures, adoption of children and adults, and creation of kinship units consisting of non-blood relatives created some sense of communal cohesion amongst enslaved people and acted as networks of information transference and bases for plotting against planters. As stated by Bush, the assumption of these responsibilities corresponded with African traditions of female identity emerging from motherhood and deeper kinship ties which became incorporated into Creole Afro-Caribbean social dynamics.[75] Likewise, considering different manifestations of kinship shown within accounts of the Middle Passage, inferred from court records and fugitive slave adverts, inside letters, and suggested through artworks demonstrates how some rebel enslaved women tried to reunite with lost kin, forge survival networks, or become community leaders. However, with some kinship relationships more concealed within the archive, it is necessary to infer relationships from sources which sought to continually isolate enslaved women and impose their identity as solely that of a worker for colonial plantocracies.

Prior to enslavement in Jamaica and Barbados, kinship ties were also formed amongst captured African men, women, and children during the Middle Passage where women formed relationships which persisted once they disembarked at their location. For instance, the final segment of Sibell's narrative signifies her and her allies forming a group to strengthen their chances of survival.[76] Specifically, this is

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[74] Dadzie, *A Kick in the Belly,* pp.166-7
[75] Bush, ''Sable venus', 'she devil' or 'drudge'?', pp.765-6
[76] J.S. Handler, 'Memoirs of Sibell and Ashy, trans. John Ford, (Barbados, 1799)' in 'Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in Barbados', *Slavery and Abolition,* 19/1 (1998), pp.132-3

shown via her remembrance of familiar people aboard the ship which transported her to Barbados: 'country woman Mimbo, my country man Dublin, my country woman Sally and some more, but dey sell dem all about me and me no savvy where now.' [77] Here, the inference can be made that Sibell focused on Mimbo, Dublin, and Sally since they were her closest allies during the Middle Passage and the relationship which they forged together strengthened throughout the harrowing journey, and thus increased their chances of survival. Concerning the Middle Passage and slavery, Jennifer Morgan argues that the creation of kinship under these conditions should not be interpreted as matters of agency or assertions of humanity since they are complicit with white supremacy due to their dangerous oversimplification about the complexities of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and reasons used to justify it.[78] Instead, Morgan advocates for evaluating kinship as the 'refusal of structures of commodification' present within the entire colonial operation.[79] Moreover, this refusal and manifestations of kinship during the Middle Passage is exemplified in the singing heard by Sibell in the 'long House full of new Negurs talking and making sing.'[80] Specifically, John Hunter Moore conveys that the singing heard by Sibell as she was forced onboard the slave ship substantiates the claim that they would have continued singing during the journey to reconstruct a sense of community in line with African practices of songs being deployed to signify major life events.[81] Hence, Sibell's narrative aptly demonstrates how enslaved women forged and reciprocated kinship ties with each other and enslaved men during the Middle Passage.

Enslaved women's experiences of motherhood and its denial through forced separations, high infant mortality rates, infanticide, fatal punishments and other tragedies undoubtedly shaped enslaved women's experiences and decisions to exhibit more resistant behaviour in the first place. As mentioned earlier, Robert Wedderburn was separated from his mother Rosanna aged four around the mid-

[77] Handler, 'Memoirs of Sibell and Ashy', p.133
[78] J.L. Morgan, 'Kinship, the Middle Passage, and the Origins of Racial Slavery', in D. Willis, E, Toscano, and K. Brooks Nelson (eds.), *Women and migration: responses in Art and History*, (Cambridge, 2019), pp.204-5
[79] Morgan, 'Kinship, the Middle Passage, and the Origins of Racial Slavery', p.205
[80] Handler, 'Memoirs of Sibell and Ashy', p.133
[81] J. Hunter Moore, ''Singing for Strength: Enslaved Africans and Community Building in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.', Vanderbilt University, *Masters paper* (2009), pp.1-2; p.11

1760s and brought to the plantation where his grandmother lived to be raised as free, which except for Robert's manumission, was a common experience for enslaved families.[82] Typically, enslaved mothers lost control over their children's socialisation from around four or five years old because this milestone coincided with their introduction into the plantation system.[83] To prevent separation and the suffering that their children would encounter in plantocracies, some enslaved women resorted to using abortifacients and medicinal knowledge which survived the Middle Passage.[84] Alternatively, they committed infanticide which Nichols explores in her poem 'Ala' where an enslaved Black woman named Uzo is executed and framed as 'the rebel woman' for 'sending her little-new-born […] back to Africa – free' which in its tone implicates the situation as an act of mercy.[85] Renée Landell argues the poem redefines conceptions around maternal love during slavery in the Caribbean since it essentially frames Uzo's actions within the realms of African spirituality which is depicted as a salient act to ensure the freedom of her child.[86] Likewise, the refusal or pursuit of motherhood was considered controversial depending on if enslaved women visibly acted with the minimal reproductive agency they possessed.

Regularly, enslaved women fought to be reunited with and remain with their children, nephews and nieces, or younger siblings they cared for and those who went in search of lost kin tended to flee to places where they already had pre-established kinship ties or family members.[87] In an October 1787 edition of the *Barbados Mercury,* one advert describes a small reward for the capture of a middle-aged woman named Affey. [88] According to the subscriber, Affey 'is well known in Bridge Town and has comrades in different parts of the island' and suspected to be harboured at the plantation of a Sir William Fitzherbert where Exeter, the father of her

[82] Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery*, p.48
[83] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* p.106
[84] J.L. Morgan., *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*. (Philadelphia, 2004), pp.113-5
[85] Nichols, *I is a long memoried woman*, pp.22-3
[86] R. Landell, '"Wi Run Tings, Tings Nuh Run Wi": Black Humanity and the Nonhuman World in Anglophone Caribbean Neo-slave Narratives, 1983-2020', Royal Holloway, University of London, *PhD thesis* (2024), pp.104-10
[87] Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838,* pp.65-6
[88] 'A Reward of Two Moidores', *Barbados Mercury*, 9 October 1787, p.3 col. a

children resides.[89] Despite her numerous 'comrades', Affey seemingly prioritised being reunited with her family and the advert's notification of her extensive social network implies other people were willing to help her and said network extended beyond her relationship with Exeter.[90] Unfortunately, the advert doesn't reveal whether or not Affey used to be housed at Fitzherbert's plantation but she evidently sought to rebuild a sense of kinship amongst the family she had been separated from.

The narrative and legal petitions of Elizabeth "Betsy" Ann Miler (née Newton), a formerly enslaved woman from Barbados and another daughter of the Old Doll highlights the lengths enslaved and manumitted Black women would go to for the sake of securing their freedom and that of their biological children. Interviewed by her former master Thomas Lane in the late 1790s, the narrative is found on the last page of a letter written by Thomas Lane to John Lane concerning plantation business matters.[91] Elizabeth escaped the Newton plantation in around 1794 during a period of financial difficulties, boarded a ship to the neighbouring island of St Vincent, sailed to England where she sought and failed to gain permission her immediate family's manumission from the Newton family, and married a free Black man who started a family with her in London.[92] Remarkably, the narrative reveals that Elizabeth along with her new family travelled from England to Barbados to personally ask for 'her freedom' which she had already taken for herself 'by setting foot on English ground' and requested manumission for her four children who remained on the plantation.[93]

Despite liberating herself, Elizabeth Ann Miler was still the victim of a cruel socio-legal practice condemned by contemporary abolitionists like Dr George Pinckard who thought the separation of mothers and children was an 'unnatural appropriation of human substance'.[94] Having spoken with an enslaved woman and her young daughter in a tavern in Bridgetown, Pinckard dismays at the precedent that even if

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[89] 'A Reward of Two Moidores' p.3 col. a
[90] Ibid., p.3 col. a
[91] London, SHL University of London, MS523/973 'Report by Thomas Lane on an interview with Elizabeth Newton, an ex-slave, probably part of a letter to John Lane.' (1794-97)
[92] SHL MS523/973; Beckles, *Natural Rebels*, pp.161-2
[93] SHL MS523/973
[94] G. Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies, Vol. 1*. (London, 1806), pp.247-8

enslaved women succeeded in obtaining their freedom, ‘she cannot claim her child; but must leave it…’ since they ‘becomes the absolute property’ of planters.[95] Ultimately, Thomas Lane perceives Elizabeth as confused and foolish for returning to Barbados to seek his approval regarding her own manumission and for that of her children who remained enslaved at Newton. However, after meeting with Lane in Barbados, Elizabeth launched a legal petition for her children’s manumission in May 1801 from England to grant ‘under his hand a certificate of her own freedom and an order upon his agent for the release of her children.’[96] According to Beckles, the combined approach of resorting to marronage and legal pathways was unique for rebel enslaved women who wished to emancipate themselves and their kin.[97] Regardless, her bold request to force Lane to acknowledge her as a freewoman whilst manumit her children demonstrates Elizabeth’s assertion of her children’s rights and her role as their mother and protector, even if her demands were not realised until slavery was abolished in 1838, long after her death.

Enslaved women who tried running away with their children or other family members were deemed a practical and economic inconvenience to the planter classes of Jamaica and Barbados during this era since it disrupted the progress of plantation labour. Plus, given that white wealthy planters like William Thomas Beckford understood motherhood and kinship within the terms of profit and practicality, enslaved Black women and girls were ‘brought young’ for the intention of bearing children sooner rather than later.[98] Having inherited plantations in Jamaica from his father in the late eighteenth century, Beckford perceived Black motherhood as a bonus since Black mothers in his view raised large families on plantations ‘without any expense to the master, or seeming distress to herself’ and encouraged other planters to do the same.[99] Likewise, escape attempts to flee happened so frequently that it was considered almost a daily occurrence for slaveholders in Jamaica and Barbados as shown in its casual mention in Jamaica-based planter Simon Taylor’s

[95] Pinckard, *Notes on the West Indies*, pp.277-8
[96] London, SHL University of London, ‘Elizabeth Newton to Thomas Lane’ (25 May 1801) MS523/441
[97] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* pp.161-2
[98] W.T. Beckford, *Remarks upon the situation of negroes in Jamaica, impartially made from a local experience of nearly thirteen years in that island,* (London, 1788), pp.23-5
[99] Ibid., p.24

notes on the return two enslaved girls in January 1790 concealed amongst his dinner plans.[100]

When infant or young children were involved in runaway adverts, these cases illustrated the modes of protection enslaved women used to try and remove them from the organs of slavery. Recorded in an October 1810 issue of the *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, a woman named Jenny Betsey was advertised as a runaway 'carrying her child with her, a boy about 11 months old'.[101] In Jenny Betsey's case it is reasonable to suggest that given there is no suspected location in which they're harboured, they've either been concealed by other kin or committed to marronage.[102] Similarly, an enslaved woman named Diana in the 1816 Clarendon Parish slave trial records was found guilty of 'smuggling a child' and sentenced to the workhouse for one month and thirty-nine lashes on release.[103] Despite the child's origin remaining unconfirmed, enslaved people were categorised as property which might explain why Diana was prosecuted on smuggling charges which were likely guided by 1795 legislation on 'regulating abuses committed by slaves' .[104] Potentially, she was harbouring an enslaved child and thus in the eyes of prosecutors, had illegally acquired property.

Enslaved women possessed contacts in rural and urban locations which tended to represent different strands of kinship networks and their importance. Julianna Wessels's digital cartography project on mapping the theorised movements of enslaved people in select fugitive slave adverts of the *BMBG* importantly showcases this idea and possible kinship networks across the whole island during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries.[105] The visualisation of Lucy's journey recorded in October 1807 connects the pursuit of kinship with marronage as a

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[100] London, SHL University of London, ICS120/14/A/51 '6.1.1790, 'Return of two female slaves by Simon Taylor, one with swelled arm, one with one eye'
[101] 'RUNAWAY from the subscriber', *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, 20 October 1810, p.1 col b.
[102] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* pp.166-7
[103] TNA, CO 137/147, fo.23-4
[104] *House of Commons Papers* (1816), xix, (259) 'COLONIAL LAWS RELATING TO IMPORTATION AND PROTECTION OF SLAVES IN W. INDIA COLONIES, 1788-1815' (ProQuest), pp.84-6
[105] J. Wessels, The Fugitive Barbados Mapping Project: Speculative Knowledge and Movement in the Archive' *Northeastern University,* (April, 2021), URL: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/78af50ed1ebb4c8993f1086c1f0e0ce9

means of forming a female rebel identity. Featured as case numbers 17-18, the advert from the *BMBG* from October 1807 briefly describes Lucy as suspected to be 'living in the thickets' and absent from her owner for 'a number of years'.[106] Her route as plotted by Wessels shows she travelled a significant distance from just outside of Bridgetown to the far west of the island where no known settlements were established.[107] Likewise, it is reasonable to theorise that Lucy had kinship ties to those among the 'thickets' whose possible identities are not elaborated upon, or she fled to become a Barbadian Maroon woman, using the rural environment to conceal herself along with the networks and resources she discovered like the Maroon women of Jamaica.[108] Essentially, Wessels's visualisations illustrate the routes enslaved women in Barbados took to pursue their lost kin or commit to marronage in rural, more isolated areas.[109] In turn, building on Gad Heuman's earlier observation of trends within fugitive slave adverts in Barbados where he suggests more female runaways went to the countryside rather than in towns which correlated with women and girls being less likely to possess skilled occupations and escape less frequently than their male counterparts.[110]

The bonds of sisterhood formed amongst enslaved women for survival and occasionally vengeful purposes are another important angle to consider when perceiving female rebel identity. Collaborations amongst enslaved women and between themselves and enslaved girls not only helped facilitate the continuation of socio-cultural knowledge but also passed down alternative means of mitigating enslavement. In a court report from a December 1782 issue of the *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega*, Nancy and Mary, a Black woman and biracial girl who worked in their master Richard Lewing's house, were both found guilty of trying to poison him with 'oil of vitriol' – otherwise known as concentrated sulfuric acid – hidden in

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[106] 'THIRTY POUNDS REWARD' *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, 28 November 1807, p.1, col. a
[107] Wessels, The Fugitive Barbados Mapping Project, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/78af50ed1ebb4c8993f1086c1f0e0ce9
[108] Mair, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery*, p.30
[109] Wessels, The Fugitive Barbados Mapping Project, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/78af50ed1ebb4c8993f1086c1f0e0ce9
[110] G. Heuman, 'Runaway slaves in nineteenth century Barbados', in G. Heuman (ed.), *Out of the house of bondage: runaways, resistance, and maroonage in Africa and the New World,* (London, 1986), p.100

medicinal drink. [111] In a twist of fate, their plot was discovered by another enslaved woman named Janet who threw away the concoction upon seeing and tasting it, leading to Nancy and Mary's executions.[112]

The newspaper's report explicitly demonstrates anxieties over covert poisonings deployed by rebel enslaved Caribbean women working in slaveholders' houses and the tone of its recollection exemplifies pro-slavery beliefs which presented house women as agents of destruction.[113] In relation to this, Bush contends that enslaved women who were "promoted" to becoming domestic servants inside the plantation house used poisonings more than those who worked the fields which is unsurprising given their increased awareness of households' routines, resources, and individuals' strengths and weaknesses.[114] The trial of Nancy and Mary in the *Gazette* is perhaps a more morbid instance of sisterhood cultivated by their workplace setting and the desire for vengeance against their master. Moreover, after 1760, anti-poison legislation in Jamaica became subsumed into the criminalisation of obeah due to its usage as a popular resistance tactic during Tacky's Revolt.[115] Explained by Sasha Turner-Bryson, from this point onwards, obeah was portrayed as witchcraft and fraud by colonial authorities who in collaboration with allies in the medical field tried to rationalise its power as more psychological than supernatural.[116] Likewise, even if enslaved women were not directly practising obeah, poisonings' conflation with it meant it was subjected to much harsher penalties if its administers were discovered than before.

Relationships between enslaved men and women recorded in colonial legal documents still provide us with valuable insights into how some close relationships between enslaved people manifested into rebelliousness and perceived criminality. In the St Andrews Parish, Jamaica record book, most accusations featuring more than one person were rarely homogenous in gender. On 2 July 1782, a duo named

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[111] 'TUESDAY', *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega* 19 December 1782, p.2 col.c
[112] Ibid., p.2, col.c
[113] Altink, *Representations of Slave Women*, p.80
[114] Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838*., p.75
[115] S. Turner-Bryson, 'The Art of Power: Poison and Obeah Accusations and the Struggle for Dominance and Survival in Jamaica's Slave Society', *Caribbean Studies* 41/2 (2013), pp.63-4
[116] Ibid., pp.65-6

Alexander and Abigail were sentenced to a combined total of 117 lashes to be dispensed over three separate occasions for cutting and stealing kines (cattle or oxen).[117] Evidently, Alexander and Abigail possessed some form of mutual trust between each other to coordinate these acts of theft and sabotage before being caught and despite the minimal detail about the circumstances surrounding this offence, they were likely dependant on each other for survival.[118] However, Randy Browne suggests that by reducing these acts to just crimes committed by enslaved criminals, scholars perpetuate the slaveholder's perspective and fail to consider enslaved people's moral reasoning for taking basic necessities in the face of chronic malnourishment.[119] Of course, readers are intentionally uninformed about whether the thefts were committed to ensure the one's own survival on the plantation, to earn enough money for manumitting themselves or others, or provide resources to the Maroons. Likewise, Browne argues that we ought to consider these "thefts" as political acts intended to compensate enslaved people for their labour and redistribute its profits.[120] Therefore, both Abigail and her collaborator used their relationship to mitigate slavery by stealing livestock whilst undermining their planter's control over his property.

Indeed, whilst poisoning is recognised as a popular form of violence used by enslaved women in the house, enslaved women working in the fields also tried poisoning their masters and sometimes involved men in their plans. [121] Recorded in a copy of slave trials from St Ann's Parish, Jamaica documented in May 1814, a group of three women and three men were in court for 'conspiring the death and giving poison to C. Reynolds.' [122] Two out of the three women named Kate and Nanny were sentenced to death along with their comrade George whilst Shonia, the last woman mentioned was transported for life. The remaining two men were found not guilty. [123] Considering the severity of these sentences for the women involved compared to

[117] 'Copy of the Record Book of the slave trials of St. Andrew Jamaica from 17 March 1746 to 16 Dec. 1782 enc. in Metcalfe to Russell No 51, (5 April 1840.)', TNA, CO137/248, fo.226
[118] Ibid., fo.226
[119] R.M. Browne, *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean*, (Philadelphia, 2017), pp.167-8
[120] Ibid., pp.168-9
[121] Mair, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery,* pp.19-20
[122] 'St Anns Parish, 26 May 1814' in 'Return of Trials of Slaves.' (1814-1818), TNA, CO 137/147, fo.18
[123] TNA, CO 137/147., fo.18

men's outcomes, it is reasonable to suggest that accusations of poisonings possessed a more gendered element which was more likely to discriminate against women and girls. Furthermore, this is arguably strengthened when considering the 1782 case above which suggests that the sole and collaborative effort of acquiring and distributing poison by enslaved Caribbean women was firmly established amongst white colonists as being fundamental to perceiving female rebel identities of enslaved women.

Ultimately, unity within Afro-Barbadian and Afro-Jamaican populations and between Black and white people was seen as a dangerous precedent for colonial authorities which is notably visible in the Colonel Edward Codd's report on the 1816 Bussa's rebellion in Barbados.[124] In the report sent to the Colonial Governor of Barbados James Leith, Codd insists its spread across the island was down to the notion that 'their emancipation was decided by the British Parliament' due to misunderstandings over the 1815 Barbadian House of Assembly *Registry Bill* which 'were conveyed by mischievous persons'.[125] Indeed, some of these apparent instigators included Nanny Grig, an enslaved woman from Simmons plantation. According to the apparent confession of an enslaved man named Robert, Nanny, who was literate, announced this idea of emancipation to other enslaved people, gradually convinced them to believe this, and declared that the only way to secure freedom was to 'fight for it.'[126] Nonetheless, Codd's report attempts to undermine the fact a collective decision had taken place to overthrow the plantocracy in Barbados, yet the assertion of the decision to revolt by a sizeable population is encapsulated in the existence of the surviving rebel flag.[127] The rebel flag of concern implies those who partook in the rebellion had divine approval from God and King George III to liberate themselves along with the images of a Black man and woman stood together suggests that they were united in their intention of doing so.[128] The presumably enslaved artists behind

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[124] 'A Letter from Colonel Edward Codd to James Leith, his report of the insurrection, 25 April 1816', in 'Despatches regarding Barbados including documents relating to Bussa's Rebellion', (1816), TNA, CO 28/85, fos11-15

[125] TNA CO28/85, fo.14

[126] The Barbados Legislature*, The Report from a Select Committee of the House of Assembly, appointed to inquire into the origin, causes and progress of the late insurrection*, (Barbados; London, 1818), p.29

[127] TNA CO28/85, fos. 14-5

[128] See Figure 1.

the flag's creation remain unknown, but given the inclusion of these figures together along with the presence of written script, it's creation was undeniably a collaborative effort. Therefore, enslaved women in Bussa's Rebellion were not only invoked as symbols of freedom and unity, but also as communicators of communal and radical messages and instigators of mobilising enslaved populations.

Alternatively, some enslaved women attempted to renegotiate their identities by being in sexual relationships with white men as mistresses or concubines. To Bush, in reconstructing life for themselves in bondage, enslaved women's realities were defined by what she terms a 'triple consciousness': being forced "migrant" workers, sexual objects of white men, and linked to their own Black communities. [129] Overt expressions of sexuality by enslaved women may have been demonised, yet concubinage was a survival strategy for enslaved women and by being in closer proximity to planters, some enslaved women tried to secure social privileges for themselves and immediate family members. [130] One example of these privileges included the hope of manumission which was often legally contested by other parties. Outlined in a December 1771 letter by Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedekne, he discusses the logistics of executing the will of a fellow planter named John Archer who 'kept a wench […] named Catherine and had by her three sons…' whom he left money behind for to buy their freedom.[131] Freedom clauses were typically encoded to signify rewards for servitude and specific forms of subservience, so enslaved women were never on equal terms with the white men they were in sexual relationships with, and many were initiated via sexual abuse and violence.[132]

Additionally, the diaries of Thomas Thistlewood, a notorious rapist and Jamaican planter of the eighteenth century, totally dispel the notion of enslaved women having significant say in these relationships and reveal the extent to which women on his plantation tried to rebel against him. One of which was known as Coobah. In Trevor

[129] B. Bush, ''Sable venus', 'she devil' or 'drudge'? British slavery and the 'fabulous fiction' of black women's identities, c. 1650–1838', *Women's History Review,* Vol 9: 4, (2000), pp.763-7
[130] Ibid., p.775
[131] 'To Chaloner Arcedekne, Kingston, 3 December 1771' in Wood, B., Clayton T.R., and Speck W.A., 'The Letters of Simon Taylor of Jamaica To Chaloner Arcedekne, 1765-1775', *Camden Fifth Series,* Vol.19*,* (Cambridge, 2002), pp.107-8
[132] Beckles, 'Freeing slavery', pp.214-6

Burnard's view, we do not truly know what caused Coobah, a notably rebellious enslaved woman, to become such a monumental problem for Thistlewood.[133] However, the time when Coobah changed and became outwardly rebellious can arguably be pinpointed to another traumatic life event which she experienced. After the birth and loss of her child in March 1767, she became unmanageable and repeatedly ran away after recovering from bouts of venereal diseases from March 1769 onwards.[134] This combination of physical and psychological trauma would have permanently altered Coobah's behaviour and given the main source of her suffering, diminished any compulsion to respect Thistlewood's commands which eventually resulted in her sale in 1774 to Georgia for an insignificant sum.[135] As mentioned by Beckles, subversive resistance by women to the imposed gender order on plantation normally incurred punishments, so for enslaved women on Thistlewood's plantation, this meant resisting his sexual advances.[136] Even so, Coobah's sale may have resulted in her relocation to an American slave state and thus failed in escaping slaveocracy, but she had still achieved her aim of severing ties with Thistlewood.

Overall, enslaved women's association with motherhood, and control over kinship meant that they held elevated, and sometimes distinct, leadership positions within the social fabric of enslaved communities in Jamaica and Barbados which was vital for adopting a female rebel identity. Evidently, kinship enabled enslaved women to greatly cultivate and influence spaces with enslaved populations which somewhat emulated the gendered expectations of West African women who were socially empowered by their proximity to motherhood and creating kinship. The bonds between enslaved women, those forged with enslaved men and children along with relationships with white men were also survival tactics to minimise the psychological anguish faced by captured Africans and Afro-Caribbeans, but also acted as spaces to

[133] T. Burnard, 'Adaptation, Accommodation, and Resistance: Thistlewood's Slave Women and Their Responses to Enslavement*', Tyranny, and Desire Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*, (Chapel Hill, 2004), pp.174-5
[134] New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 'Thomas Thistlewood Papers – Diary 1767', OSB MSS 176/1/18; BRBML, Yale University, 'Diary -1769' OSB MSS 176/1/20
[135] BRBML, Yale University, 'Diary -1774' OSB MSS 176/1/25
[136] Beckles, 'Freeing slavery'., p.218

advocate for better treatment and protections, and for plotting against the white planter elite.

III. Memories in Motion with Creolisation's Promotion: Culture

The knowledge of African traditions and practices within Black communities of Jamaica and Barbados and its creolisation proved invaluable to the formation of female rebel identities of enslaved Caribbean women across the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. The prominence of the "mother-country" ideology which situated African women as public and influential figures, incorporated both notions of militancy and assertions of social standings and promoted women when they became mothers was woven into the fabric of Afro-Caribbean culture.[137] Generations of enslaved Caribbean women whether they were first-generation Africans or second or third-generation Afro-Creoles, were the propagators of what Stella Dadzie quantifies as 'collective wisdom' which in turn enabled expressions of cultural autonomy.[138] Since the 1990s, greater focus has been awarded to considering all facets of enslaved women's livelihoods in relation to resistance resulting in Caribbeanists and historians seeking more unorthodox locations of female rebel identity's manifestation within religious practices, song and dance performances, and material culture.[139] Therefore, by examining these aspects, the following discussion shows how the utilisation of culture in the construction of female rebel identity was not just about asserting one's roots but also re-creating a new cultural world in conjunction with European influences. [140]

The significance of religious practices, especially obeah, in the formation of female rebel identity of enslaved Caribbean women has been debated significantly within recent scholarship. Afrocentric religion and anything that could be viewed as unchristian customs were demonised throughout the British Caribbean but not to such a severe extent until after 1760 with the suppression of Tacky's Revolt in Jamaica. [141] Previously, the British Empire had deemed it unnecessary to ensure the

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[137] Mair, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies*, pp.1-3; pp.28-30
[138] Dadzie, *A Kick in the Belly,* p.155-8
[139] Altink 'More than Producers and Reproducers', pp.5-7
[140] M-R Trouillot, 'Culture on the Edges: Caribbean Creolization in Historical Context', in B.K. Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures,* (New York, 2002) pp. 198-9
[141] V. Brown, 'Spiritual Terror and Sacred Authority in Jamaican Slave Society', *Slavery & Abolition*, 24/1 (2003), pp.35-6

Christianisation of their enslaved populations. But since the revolt, late eighteenth-century legislation on plantation management implemented across the Anglo-Caribbean stressed the importance of plantation owners and overseers in instructing enslaved people in Christianity and its principles. [142] Hostilities towards Afrocentric religious practices and its practitioners were suddenly amplified which led to the Jamaican Assembly being the first to formally publish legislation criminalising obeah in within the 1760 *Act to Remedy the Evils.*[143] Described as a means to prevent 'many Mischiefs' of the 'wicked art of Negroes', the anti-obeah clause banned obeah practitioners, restricted Black peoples' possession of items like animal teeth, feathers, or any others 'relative to the Practice of Obeah or Witchcraft' and warned that future sentences for practising obeah would be death or transportation.[144] Moreover, the combined ignorance of lawmakers and colonial governors resulted in the conflation of medicinal practices with harmful ones on a socio-legal level.[145]

Ignorance resulted in some enslaved women inadvertently being deemed subversive characters and a greater variation of legal outcomes for obeah trials than initially anticipated. In a court case from St Andrew's Parish in April 1767, an enslaved woman named Mary was 'accused of having "material" on her for the purpose of obeah or witchcraft' but was acquitted. [146] Whilst in July 1772, a woman named Sarah was found guilty 'for having in her possession cats' teeth, cats' claws, cats' jaws, hair, beads, knotted cords […] to delude and impose on the minds of the negroes,' and subsequently sentenced to transportation. [147] Meanwhile in a Clarendon Parish case of 1816, an enslaved woman named Ammah was transported for life for 'practicing obeah' no other context provided in the record.[148] Of course, some enslaved women resorted to obeah or seeking practitioners to try and alleviate some of the suffering

[142] *House of Commons Papers* (1789), iii, (70) A Statement Of The Laws At Large, Respecting Negroes In The West India Islands. Arranged Under Different Titles (ProQuest), pp.19-21; pp.130-7; pp.143-4
[143] 'An Act to Remedey the Evils arising from Irregular Assemblies of Slaves', (1760), TNA CO 139/21, fo.1
[144] Ibid., fo.1
[145] Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838,* pp.73-5
[146] TNA, CO 137/248, fo. 220
[147] Ibid., fo.225
[148] TNA, CO 137/147, fo.24

they faced daily. [149] Yet Turner-Bryson states that such accusations were also frequently used to settle rivalries and ease tensions amongst enslaved communities and strengthen political, pro-slavery campaigns. [150] Readers are not informed of the specific "material" leading to Mary's trial whilst the nature of Ammah's obeah practice is unconfirmed which leaves some ambiguity surrounding whether they should consider their actions as consistent with rebellious activities at all.

Out of the three cases, Sarah's possesses the most intricate detail over the nature of her apparent offence which specifies animal bones, hair, and beads along with the implication that she wished to 'delude and impose on the minds' of enslaved people around her, suggesting that she had some recognisable influence within her plantation community.[151] Ultimately, with Sarah and Ammah's punishment being transportation for life, it can inferred that their roles as obeah practitioners attracted enough attention to be perceived as subversive by the Jamaican slaveocracy. Their sentencings reinforced the colonial rationalisation for criminalising obeah and arguably the emergence of the popular socio-political idea of rebel enslaved women and obeah women being one and the same from the late eighteenth century onwards. [152]

Given the dominance of men prosecuted for obeah in Jamaica, Paton suggest this 'belies the cultural prominence' of female obeah practitioners in both the British imagination and somewhat amongst Caribbean commentators as well.[153] Conversely, Bush contends that contemporary European observers of British Caribbean slaveocracies constantly hypersexualised younger enslaved women whilst depicting older enslaved women as sinister hags or obeah women which was similar to the language of eighteenth century British witch trials.[154] Specifically, female elders on the plantation were associated with what they deemed as bad African practices which stemmed from racist and ignorant ideas about African civilisation overall.[155]

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[149] Turner-Bryson, 'The Art of Power', pp.69-70
[150] Ibid., p.80
[151] TNA, CO 137/248, fo.225
[152] Brown, 'Spiritual Terror and Sacred Authority in Jamaican Slave Society', p.40
[153] D. Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World of Critical Perspectives on Empire*. (Cambridge, 2015), pp.100-1
[154] Bush, ''Sable venus', 'she devil' or 'drudge'?', pp.763-4
[155] Ibid., p.764

Marlon James's 2009 novel *The Book of Night Women* interrogates this archetype through uses of obeah by describing its multidimensional applications by differing groups of men and women, Black and white, which would have been utilised in late eighteenth-century Jamaica.[156] Regarding enslaved women, the actions of a female protagonist Homer emphasise obeah as a means of self-protection and defence as shown in her production of an antidote for the curse put upon Lillith, reflecting her leadership status amongst the night women and confidence in repeatedly undermining others who wish to circumvent their journey to freedom.[157]

Jeffrey Cottrell locates the origin of the motif of older enslaved women inherently being obeah women within the in Jamaica Agent Stephen Fuller's written testimony presented to Parliament in 1788 known as *The Woman of the Popo Country* which was replicated by contemporary English historians and novelists throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[158] Fuller's anecdote was supposedly acquired from an unnamed English planter who returned to Jamaica in 1775 after a trip to discover a sizeable amount of enslaved people had died and after speaking to one enslaved woman on her deathbed, she revealed her stepmother, an obeah woman, was responsible.[159] After the confession, a mob found the woman's house with numerous artefacts inside that confirmed her practising of obeah and it was 'instantly pulled down', its contents 'committed to the flames', and the woman sold to 'a party of Spaniards…' instead of brining her to trial.[160] Indeed, Cottrell argues that this anecdote as early example of sensationalist obeah fiction yet as seen from the court cases above, the situation seems reminiscent of Sarah's trial in 1772.[161] The anonymous, elder obeah woman and her array of animal bones, dirt, hair, and other inconspicuous items is shown as the greatest threat to the colonial order since her alleged supernatural powers extensively disrupted the socio-economic operations of

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[156] A. Ozuna, 'Feminine Power: Women Contesting Plantocracy in *The Book of Night Women*', *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 10/3 (2017), pp.137-40
[157] James, *The Book of Night Women*, pp.48-53
[158] S. Fuller, 'Copies of certain of the evidence submitted to the committee of Council for Trade and Plantations in the course of their enquiry into the state of the African slave trade.' (1788), TNA, BT 6/10, fos 182-90; J. Cottrell, 'At the end of the trade: obeah and black women in the colonial imaginary', *Atlantic Studies*, 12/2 (2015), pp.200-9
[159] TNA, BT 6/10, fos.182-5
[160] Ibid., fos.185-6
[161] Cottrell, 'At the end of the trade', p.201; TNA, CO 137/248, fo.225

the unnamed English planter. Additionally, her isolation from the rest of the plantation due to her inability to partake in physical labour alongside the suggestion that she had continued obeah 'since her arrival from Africa' encapsulated the pro-slavery sentiment of idleness and proximity to African culture resulting in insurrectionist behaviour.[162]

Having interrogated the mythologisation of obeah and its existence leading to the development of the idea of a female threat to Anglo-Caribbean slaveocracies, other forms of religious expression must be considered.[163] Namely, *jonkonnu* (John Canoe). Still practiced in certain parts of the Caribbean and Central America today, *jonkonnu* is a Christmas and New Year's festival which has become synonymous with the survival of the African spirit in the Anglophone Americas.[164] The origins of *jonkonnu* lie in the story of 'John Cannu' an Akan tribal chief who led an armed revolt against the Dutch in the early eighteenth century and was eventually captured and enslaved in Jamaica where he became a folk hero.[165] *Jonkonnu's* existence as a legacy of resistance reinforces the refusal to wholly separate Afrocentric religion and artistic performance from each other since for enslaved communities, they were often part of the same worship and celebratory objectives they established for themselves. To Brathwaite, the importance of analysing *jonkonnu* is grounded in its high visibility within the archive compared to other more notably West African religious expressions that were submerged as a means of survival.[166] Nonetheless, the degree in which this celebration maintained outward religiosity as time progressed has been debated by other scholars like Kenneth Bilby who interrogate how secularisation influenced the roots and development of *jonkonnu* itself over time.[167]

Many written accounts of *jonkonnu* celebrations in Jamaica were recorded by European commentators with differing receptions to the performances in the late

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[162] TNA, BT 6/10., fos. 182-90
[163] Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica*, pp.14-5
[164] K. Bilby, 'Surviving Secularization: Masking the Spirit in the Jankunu (John Canoe) festivals of the Caribbean,' *New West Indian Guide,* 84/3-4 (2010), pp.179-80
[165] J. M. Gibbs, 'Jonkanno Performances of Resistance, Freedom and Memory', in E. O'Callaghan and T. Watson (eds.), *Caribbean Literature in Transition: 1800-1920* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 52-3
[166] Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica*, p.15
[167] Bilby, 'Surviving Secularization', pp.182- 217

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but few barely dwell on the roles of enslaved women. Judging by the respective accounts of Matthew Gregory Lewis and Samuel Baker who witnessed an 1816 *jonkonnu* celebration, it's occurrence during the Christmas period signified its adoption into the accepted framework of Christianised cultural expression and injections of Eurocentric carnival traditions permitted by the white European elite.[168] Nonetheless, Baker's perspective of the *jonkonnu* attire is pessimistic and cynical since he rationalises the 'houseslaves' ladies 'dressed in their best attire' as proving that 'no proof can be found of poverty' and resented the 'informal noises' of *jonkonnu*.[169] Therefore, disruption was a core feature of *jonkonnu* down to the material level.

Lewis's recollection delves much deeper into enslaved women's positioning in the procession as 'Red' and 'Blue' girls along with some being the parade's figureheads. Apparently, he witnessed an enslaved young woman of an associate named Miss Edwards dressed up as the figure of Britannia on the 'Blue' team seeming 'bashful at appearing in this conspicuous manner' and refuses to move into position in front of the crowd.[170] Eventually, she, only referred to as the 'Goddess' is pushed by Miss Edwards into her position for the parade.[171] The young woman's refusal to wear the costume of Britannia might suggest that she did not want to embody an imperial, idealised symbol which connotes her subjugation. Subsequently, by initially refusing to partake and entertain as this figure in the *jonkonnu* parade, her lack of movement is her refusal to perform the imperial identity prescribed to her not just in the moment but as an enslaved woman at beck and call of her mistress, leading to her seizure and forced placement.

The dress and actions of the body constantly defined the positioning and roles of the enslaved Caribbean woman within Jamaica and Barbados. Whilst the above example of female rebel identity is conveyed through a fleeting moment of the rejection of an imperial costume, now we shall see how the adoption of certain dress, materials, and

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[168] M.G. Lewis, *Journal of a West-India Proprietor: Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica,* (London, 1845), pp.51-2; Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Eng. misc. e. 1391. 'Journal of Samuel Baker on a voyage on the "Bernard" to Jamaica, 7 Oct 1815-29 May 1816', fos.22-3
[169] MS Eng. misc. e. 1391, fos.22-3
[170] Ibid., p.54
[171] Ibid., p.54

styles, influences perceptions of female rebel identity of enslaved women. Observations of dress and its significance within the lives of enslaved women in this period have predominately focused on how clothing styles and clothes making reflected the structural power relations present within Anglo-Caribbean colonies down to the literal material level.[172] Goods advertisements describing items exported from England to Barbados in contemporary newspapers outlined the scale of these differences with cheap materials like 'broad cloath' deemed suitable and frugal to slaveholders for clothing their plantation populations.[173] The stylistic variations as well as those in quality exemplified the extent to which colonial societies sought to perpetuate what Steve Buckridge interprets as multiple ideologies of the other.[174] With this class distinction ingrained into colonial society, it is through the portrayal of alternative physical appearances via dignification, subversive dress, or disguise where some enslaved women tried adopting a female rebel identity through both their daily attire and occasion wear.

Marsha Pearce's contention on the significance of dress and aesthetic therapy in both colonial and post-colonial Caribbean elaborates on dignification's importance. To Pearce, getting dressed is a practice of attending to the body which is a stark contrast to the abuse the bodies of enslaved people were subjected to.[175] Likewise, dress became a strategy of subversion which enabled them to 'look like people' in the face of dehumanisation and physically feel freer in this form of aesthetic therapy.[176] Arguably, the most famous example of such dignification in action was the divination of Cubah. Featured in Long's account of Tacky's Revolt in 1760, Cubah was an enslaved woman who amongst the Akan population was dubbed the 'queen of Kingston' and dressed in a short robe on her shoulder and makeshift crown whilst carrying a wooden sword with a red feather on its handle.[177] Her outfit embodies the 'Queen Mother' figure which implicates the recreation of an Afrocentric kingdom

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[172] S.O. Buckridge, *The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica 1760-1890,* (Kingston, Jamaica: 2004), p.78
[173] 'Untitled', *Barbados Mercury,* 16 August 1788, p.3, col.c; 'NEW NEGRO CLOATHING', *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette,* 21 July 1810, p.1, col.c
[174] Buckridge, *The Language of Dress*., p.78-9
[175] M. Pearce, 'Looking Like People; Feeling Like People: The Black Body, Dress and Aesthetic Therapy in the Caribbean,' *Culture Unbound*, 6/4 (2014), p.858-9
[176] Ibid., pp.858-62
[177] E. Long, *The history of Jamaica*, Vol. 2 (London, 1774), p.455

along with an overt demonstration of her power as a leader and importantly, as a symbol of unity.[178] Therefore, the creation of her outfit and the significance of Cubah as its wearer suggests it was a collaborative effort and subsequently, enhances her remembrance as a cultural icon.

Subversive dress is a complex aspect to dissect in this section due to the sheer variations of its covert and overt deployment, some of which exacerbates the notion of subalternity when it comes to locating enslaved Caribbean women in the archive due to the focus on the female body rather than the woman's life. As we have seen in previous chapters, subversive dress was not only reserved for instances of mass revolt and rebellion. It was also worn by some enslaved women as disguises as done by Phurah and incorporated into celebrations like *jonkonnu*. But first, let us turn to the matter of disguise. Mentioned earlier, the combination of Phurah's language skills and physical appearance helped in her ability to evade capture so far from colonial authorities in Jamaica and would have helped her case to pass as an employed free Black woman.[179] Alternatively, other enslaved women such as Betty reported for running away and stealing a 'bundle of good cloth' in August 1782 opted to steal higher quality clothes for her journey and potential destination.[180] Ironically, the lack of explicitly written laws about sartorial restrictions for enslaved people in the Anglophone Caribbean assisted in advancing the journeys of Phurah and Betty. In Jamaica, there were no precise fashion laws regulating dress for enslaved people, with the expectation that the population would simply adhere to social norms.[181] Whereas in the seventeenth century *Barbados Slave Code*, enslaved people were given minimal clothing allowances which mandated them to receive clothes once a year with women receiving petticoats and men given a 'cappe' and drawers. [182] Likewise, the disguise method was replicated in Barbados when runaway enslaved women tried to pass as free.

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[178] Buckridge, *The Language of Dress*., pp.84-5; Mair *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery,* p.21
[179] 'Runaway […] A Negro wench named Phurah.', p.2 col. c.
[180] 'RANAWAY, about five weeks since…' *Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega*, 29 August 1782, p.4, col b.
[181] Buckridge, *The Language of Dress,* pp.82-3
[182] 'The Barbados Slave Code 1667 in List of Acts Barbados tb 82', TNA CO 30/2, fo.18

From what can be observed from enslaved women's fugitive slave adverts which mention dress, dressing well or dressing as free women were fundamental to some women's rebelliousness, their attempts to assert self-autonomy, and reformation of their identities. Within fugitive slave adverts of this era, few specified the nature of the enslaved women's dress unless it was a notable enough to massively compromise their identification as an enslaved person by free and enslaved Barbadians. In July 1811, the BMBG reported that Mary Jane, an enslaved mixed-race woman who is described as 'thin, and rather tall, dresses well…', fled Staple Grove plantation.[183] When compared to most other descriptions of runaway Black and mixed-race enslaved women, we are left to theorise whether they also tried to dress well or as free women. Still, an earlier article from July 1809 shows a more audacious attempt was made by an enslaved Black woman from St Vincent to pass as a free woman in Barbados.[184] With forged papers and the aliases 'Sally Small' and 'Sarah Headly' her identity as a fugitive was revealed after an interrogation by colonial officials in Bridgetown.[185] On a surface level, passing as free meant the existence of paperwork sanctioning an enslaved person's manumission and newfound status in colonial plantocracies. Regardless, although Sally/Sarah's physical traits are written in the notes, the sheer scope of her concealment strongly implies she was trying pass free both legally and materially.

Displays of cultural motifs within dress was an important part of some enslaved women's female rebel identity within the plantation. Nicole Wilson contends that the existence of Afro-Creole headwraps provide material insights into how Black women demonstrated sartorial insurgency in response to repressive eighteenth-century fashion laws that prevented them from adorning themselves or openly wearing their natural hair in places like Saint-Domingue (modern-day Haiti), Dutch Caribbean, and Spanish Louisiana.[186] Of course, headwraps were also a fundamental part of creole fashion within the Anglophone Caribbean and were popular amongst Black, mixed-

[183] 'Mr Henry Mayers will give […] A Mulatto woman by the name of Mary Jane.' *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette,* 27 July 1811, p.1, col b.
[184] 'Barbados', *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette,* 22 July 1809, p.2, col a.
[185] Ibid., p.2, col a.
[186] N. Willson, 'Sartorial insurgencies: Rebel women, headwraps and the revolutionary Black Atlantic', *Atlantic Studies*, 19/1 (2022), pp.86-106

race, and white women.[187] Specific headwrap styles and their corresponding materials used to make them were associated with different social stratifications and varying invocations of Afrocentrism in colonial dress.

Though miniscule in scale, Berryman's early nineteenth century pencil and watercolour sketches of enslaved men and women in 'Negro portraits' shows the varying colours and styles of some enslaved women's headwraps which seemed dependant on personal choice.[188] Thankfully, other pieces of Berryman's work provide a closer look into this. With their faces and heads coloured in, 'Portraits of two native women one black and one light-skinned, Jamaica' focuses on the women's features above the shoulder and demonstrates the different stylings of what appears to be Madras cloth in red and purple.[189] Arguably, we can invoke Buckridge's contention that headwraps exemplify the overlap of accommodation and resistance in Jamaican plantocracy.[190] Opportunities to choose anything within their livelihoods was near non-existent for enslaved women but given headwraps in this context were originally from the Africa, enslaved women in Barbados and Jamaica used them as a form of self-expression whenever possible.

Lastly, artistic expression in the forms of song and dance are valuable mediums in which can be evaluated to determine how they influence perceptions of enslaved women's female rebel identity. Even so, less attention has been awarded to the significance of enslaved women's songs and dance and their roles within communal performances due to what Altink identifies as a narrow fixation on their livelihoods in relation to their labour alone which is her main critique of Bush's 1990 monograph.[191] Enslaved women predominately led songs which were supposed to entertain their listeners, but still had their place in work and funeral songs.[192] Transcribed by English abolitionist Granville Sharp and colonial governor William Dickson in around 1775, 'Massa buy me he won't killa me' is a Barbadian work song that seemingly follows the usual call-and-response structure with women singing the chorus as indicated by the

[187] Buckridge, *The Language of Dress*, pp.87-91
[188] See Figure 2.
[189] See Figure 3.
[190] Buckridge, *The Language of Dress* pp.104-6
[191] Altink, 'More than Producers and Reproducers,' pp.1-3
[192] Ibid., pp.5-6

treble line. [193] Whilst the copies suggest multiple attempts to decipher lyrics and notation, their notes about the lyrics 'fore I live with a bad man Obudda-bo […] 'fore I would go to the riverside regulaw' associate this character with destruction and allude to the devil which implicates their singers' desire to forsake labour and live outside the plantation. [194] Despite Altink's critique, Bush contends that language and song were key to enslaved women's cultural defiance and even transcended the typical boundaries of female participation in traditional West African choral traditions where women only joined in the choruses rather than the verses as well.[195] Arguably, this is confirmed in a 2012 project led by Hubert Devonish on the plantation songs of the Moore Town Maroons which had survived via the oral history tradition.[196] In the video, viewers are shown two performances sung in the Kromanti language, but the retelling of how 'We yu bin dis lang taim' (Where you been this long time) clearly shows the rhythmic swaying and twirling dancing of women in the choir circle's centre as fundamental to conveying the song's investigative narrative whilst complementing the jovial beat of the instrumental lines.[197]

Many surviving songs about and sung by enslaved women contained highly sexual content which proved scandalising to the European social norms. Recorded in 1790 by Moreton, 'Me Know No Law, Me Know No Sin' is a satirical song about the disempowerment of Black women and sexual promiscuity being a form of survival.[198] There are many dark moments the persona encounters yet one distinctly ironic trope within the song is her suggestion that her master offers preferential treatment or punishes her depending on if the children she gives birth to 'come black' or 'come white.'[199] As conveyed by Altink, the argument can be made that dance and song to some extent restricted enslaved women's gender identity due to the reinforcement of the binary hierarchy between enslaved men and women shown via their roles in

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[193] Unknown, 'Song of Negro Slaves at Barbados' (1775-1799), Gloucestershire Archives, No.13_3_27
[194] 'Song of Negro Slaves at Barbados', GA, No.13_3_27
[195] Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society,* pp.158-60
[196] The Moore Town Maroons of Jamaica – Plantation Songs https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHzeuAnk0KM (recorded February 2012, uploaded 13 January 2015)
[197] Ibid.
[198] Moreton, *West India customs and manners*, pp.154-5
[199] Ibid., p.154

artistic performances.[200] Yet, Carolyn Cooper acknowledges the song as an early example of women's promiscuous sexuality being a prominent feature in alternative oral discourse on histories of enslavement and a testimony to the strength of oral transmission in Jamaican culture.[201] Nonetheless, 'Me Know No Law, Me Know No Sin' proves that enslaved women were acutely aware of the monetisation of their reproductive capabilities despite their racial and sexual oppression and the ability to for even just a line of melody, disempower and humiliate their own oppressors.

From 1760-1816, expressions of culture within Anglo-Caribbean creole societies were enacted by enslaved women as a means of reinventing community engagement as well as materially and physically asserting a sense of self which were valuable to sustaining a female rebel identity. Enslaved women not only helped recreate African traditions and invented resistant modes of cultural expression but were also instrumental in ensuring their continuation through kinship and oral histories. Despite the existence of practices like obeah which repeatedly fought the white supremacist notion that British and European cultures were inherently superior, Caribbean cultural traditions like *jonkonnu* and many recorded songs reveal that creolisation helped preserve many of them. Regardless, the possibility of possessing some level of autonomy in an environment which sought to constantly depersonalise and dehumanise resulted in explicit and implicit methods of resistance which materialised in religion, performances, and dress. In turn, this provided occasional moments of relief, material and physical self-expression, and sustained the new cultural world that enslaved people recreated for themselves.

[200] Altink 'More than Producers and Reproducers', pp.9-10
[201] C. Cooper, ''Me know no law, me know no sin': transgressive identities and the voice of innocence: the historical context', *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the "vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*, (London, 1993), pp.21-2

Conclusion

Through the themes of language, kinship, and culture, this dissertation has demonstrated how strategic adaptations of these facets in Jamaica and Barbados by enslaved women were cultivated on land and during the Middle Passage to create covert and overt forms of rebellion. West African traditions and socio-cultural expectations were central to the enslaved women's adoption of female rebel identity which sought to positively re-individualise and self-reconstruct them via memories and knowledge acquired from captured Africans and their descendants. Likewise, the existence of these influences amongst enslaved communities and their persistence during creolisation highlighted their conflict with British colonial plantocracies which deemed some of its manifestations as "uncivilised", insurrectionist or transgressive.

Throughout this dissertation, I have conducted a sustained reassessment of the relationship between enslaved woman's subalternity with the female rebel identity via examinations of the unsaid and extraction of contextual realities from enslaved women's experiences in the case studies above. Plus, by minimising thematic focus on violence, I have attempted to minimise epistemological trauma upon the enslaved female figure and not resurrect them for what Hartman identifies as a second order of violence that subsequently creates a site of disruption separate from the historical narrative.[202] However, this aspect was discarded since discussions of physical, sexual, and psychological abuses enslaved women defended themselves and others from because slavery is inherently violent. Thus, to dispel violence from the studies of enslaved women in the Caribbean entirely is inconceivable.

Of course, there are practical limitations with studying Caribbean enslaved women's histories – the most obvious being that it is highly likely that some documents about or authored by enslaved women have not survived today like the remainder of Florence Akeiso Hall's memoir.[203] Material and written evidence from the perspective of enslaved and manumitted women in Jamaica and Barbados themselves is minimal and recollections by European writers frequently lumped enslaved men and women

[202] Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', pp.4-14
[203] Hall, *Memoirs of the Life of Florence Hall*, p.4

into a collective unit during instances of collective small-scale insurrection along with mass rebellion. Plus, when records of enslaved Black women's conversations and presences in transgressive contexts are available the archive, we have resorted to theorising what the unsaid remains to some extent. Frequently, context which would have provided readers with more detail on incidents concerning enslaved women was deliberately omitted from slave trials, fugitive adverts, and the like which has led to historical speculation being utilised within this methodological approach.

Nonetheless, the female rebel identity of enslaved women should be perceived as encompassing assertions of dignity via undermining colonial authority via spoken and written means, protecting themselves and kin, and importantly, existing beyond the paradigms of mass rebellion and revolt. As this dissertation has shown, this identity can be seen and inferred in written and visual sources in the archive and this realisation is arguably disruptive considering the implications it holds within the historical narrative. Uncovering identities, their constructions, and perceptions through time is a political act, as much as it is a historical one. Evidently, the intersection of constructing histories of identities and subversion cannot fall within the confines of respectability. This work's focus on perceiving women's female rebel identity in Barbados and Jamaica not only disrupts but disrespects the once prevailing idea of enslaved women being largely uninvolved in insurrections and rebellious activity in the Anglophone Caribbean. Therefore, it has become part of the growing scholarship which advocates for enslaved women, be it as runaways, queen mothers, or rude singers in their rebelliousness, to be known as present, dynamic, figures in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Appendices

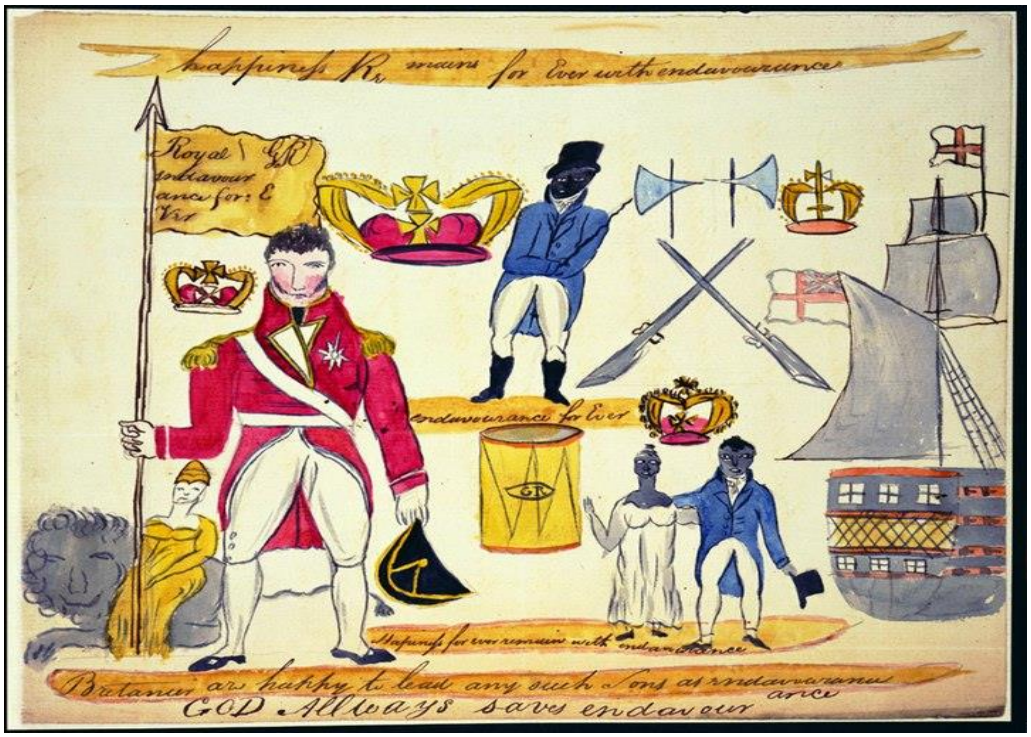

Figure 1: Unknown, *Sketch of a flag taken from rebels against slavery in Barbados, after the uprising known as Bussa's Rebellion*, ink and watercolour, c.1816. (The National Archives Online Image Library, London)

Figure 2. William Berryman, *Negro Portraits, 16 Small Drawings With Notations*., watercolour, c.1808-16. 11.9 x 16 cm, (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.)

Figure 3. William Berryman, *Portraits of two native women, one black and one light-skinned, Jamaica*, watercolour and pencil, c.1808-16. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.)

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