In Search of Equiano's Sister:
Girlhood and Slavery in the Early Modern British Atlantic, 1600-1807

By

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Dissertation

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Introduction

Tucked in a corner of the Common Burial Ground in Newport, Rhode away Island is God's Little Acre, the oldest and largest colonial final resting place for many enslaved and free Africans and African Americans. Some of the markers date back to the 1600s, when the first Africans were brought to the growing colony. The cemetery is located on the main road of Farewell Street and is part of the Newport Common Burial Ground, which was founded in 1640 on land donated by Baptist minister and co-founder of the colony, John Clarke. The colonial African burial ground is divided into two sections by a road. To the south lies the cemetery for freemen, the other designated for the enslaved. One of the first people interred in the African burial ground was Hector Butcher, who arrived in Newport from Barbados with Ann Butcher who held him in bondage. He passed away on August 12, 1720, at the age of thirty-seven.[1]

On a hot summer day in July 2019, I visited God's Little Acre. Once through the wrought iron gates, the outside world, with its cacophony of traffic, and visiting tourists faded away. The quiet of the hallowed space attuned the senses to the energy of the deceased, their graves discernible by weathered slate markers carved with angels, some with African features, and whose eyes ostensibly observed the living. Each step was measured for the sedgy landscape contained small mounds and slight crevices, some filled with rainwater from the previous night. Immediately I recalled the undulating grassy landscape of an antebellum cemetery in Charleston, South Carolina, the only difference being geographical location. There, the knowledgeable guide advised that the highs and lows of the landscape were indicative of bodies resting in the earth, hence one should be careful of where their steps fell. I was very careful.

Cautiously I made my way to the enslaved section of the cemetery. This was not like being in a standing brick and mortar repository, reading through finding aides and waiting for the archivist to bring the requested materials. At least while sitting in a building, sorting through

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[1] "African American Cemeteries and Grave Markers, Volume 1," AGS Quarterly Volume 1, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2018, 30.

files that preface the capitalist and colonial schema bound to the institution of slavery I could compartmentalize my emotions and put on the stoic and intellectual historian stance. But here, in this burial ground, my façade shattered. Each gravestone I passed sent a shockwave of awareness through my being as questions began to rapidly fire through my mind … wanting to know more about the souls lying beneath my feet. What was their life like before coming to rest in this place? Were they African … and if they were, when did they arrive in Newport? Were they first taken to Barbados or Antigua, or Jamaica then brought to New England … or were they born enslaved in Newport? Did they lead a harsh life in bondage, or were the colonists they served benevolent, teaching them to read and write despite the laws discouraging such actions? And what of the free and enslaved communities they were a part of? Not far from the cemetery lies Coddington's Cove, feeding into waterways, from Providence to Newport, then out to the vast and dark waters of the Atlantic Ocean. What a cruel twist of irony it would be if the full sails of ships bound for the southern colonies, the British Caribbean and Africa were visible from the final resting place of the enslaved.

It did not take me long to find the slate marker I was looking for. The inscription reads:

In Memory of Peg, a Negro Servant to Henry Bull, ESQ., died July 25, 1740,
Aged 6 years

The death of a child is not easy to bear. But for little Peg, even in death, Henry Bull claimed her as his property. Born in 1687, Henry Bull Jr. married Phebe Coggeshell, a daughter from one of Massachusetts's Bay elite families. By 1727, he was Attorney General of Rhode Island.[2] A cursory search reveals little information about the individuals Henry Bull held in bondage. Therefore, it is difficult to trace if Peg arrived in Newport, from Africa (did she arrive sick, ill from a long journey or the cold weather?) or if she was born in the colony, her mother enslaved by the Bull family. In 1740, Newport census records did not contain a schedule to list the

[2] His father, also named Henry, migrated from England in 1637 and settled in Newport. "Gov. Henry Bull and his Descendants," Rhode Island Historical Magazine, V.5, July 1884, 12-17. Digitized by the Internet Archive. http://www.archive.org/details/govhenrybullhisdOOnewp

numbers of captives in a colonist's household and because Henry Bull died in 1774, thirty-four years after young Peg, it makes no sense to reference his last will and testament. But, the 1774 census lists the number of Black individuals in the Bull household at five. Furthermore, between 1732 and 1740, only two vessels returned to Newport from the African coast, one in 1738 captained by a Captain Kennicut and the other in 1739 by a Captain Potter.[3] For both voyages, more than one hundred captives disembarked in the Americas, but no other information is given about where the vessels did business on the African coast, if the first point of disembarkation was the Caribbean or New England, or the percentage breakdown by gender of the captives on board.

More questions arose as I began to ponder Peg's position within the Bull household. Did Phebe (Coggeshell) Bull take the young girl under her wing, teaching her how to knit and sew and to card wool … or how to be a proper ladies' maid? Where did she sleep? In the attic with the other servants? Or perhaps in a warm corner of the kitchen, … or maybe by her mistress's bed, on a palette on the floor, so that she would be available to her every whim. We will never know Peg's "living" story. But her presence, as an enslaved girl, held in bondage by one of Newport's influential sons, screams loudly from beyond the grave.

Some feet and headstones away from Peg stood another slate marker inscribed:

Ann, a negro child belonging to Mr. Robert Oliver and daughter to his negro Mimbo, aged 2 years. Died June 1743.[4]

Again, a colonist claimed the bodies of the enslaved, this time in life and in death as two-year-old Ann, the daughter of Mimbo, held in bondage by Robert Oliver, is laid to rest. By tracing the history of Robert Oliver, we cross paths with the Royalls of Medford, MA. Oliver, like Isaac Royall, was a planter in Antigua who migrated to Massachusetts in 1736. When he returned to Dorchester, Oliver purchased land from Isaac Royall and "brought back many slaves with him."[5]

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3 For Captain Kennicut see TSTDB voyages #36066 and #36069, For Captain Potter see TSTDB voyage #36045 and #36068

4 There is some intrigue attached to the burial of young Ann. It is believed that a duplicate headstone lies in the old North Cemetery in Dorchester, Mass.

5 James Stark, *The Loyalists of Massachusetts, and the Other Side of the American Revolution*,

Mimbo was possibly one of those captive individuals.

Scholars have surmised that Mimbo was possibly Akan from the Gold Coast, tracing the etymology of her name to the Akan day name for Tuesday. In his classification of enslaved names, Edward Long, a colonial administrator of Jamaica during the eighteenth century, noted the names of the enslaved coincided with days of the week.[6] He listed the name "Mimba" meaning born on a Saturday.[7] But by 1774, the various African nations enslaved on Jamaican plantations were not exclusive. The Akan, Igbo and other nations consistently borrowed from each other, blending their traditions with what they learned from the English, into a distinct Jamaican (or Barbadian, Antiguan or South Carolinian) culture. The name "Mimba" and "Mimbo" has also been found among enslaved females in South Carolina, another place with a large concentration of Igbo captives. Therefore, a survey of Igbo names should be considered, especially because the Akan day name for females born on Tuesday are Abena and Abla and females born on Saturday are given the name Amma, Awo or Aba.

With the possibility of Mimbo being one of the captives Oliver brought back with him to Massachusetts, then how did young Ann come to her final resting place in Newport, Rhode Island? According to historical records, Robert Oliver, being from Antigua, had relationships with several Newport merchants who were also from Antigua. Perhaps during one of the family's visits to Newport, with their captives in tow, little Ann succumbed. Perhaps the Oliver's, so enamored with such a little soul gone so soon, had a copy of the headstone commissioned to be placed in the Old North Cemetery in Dorchester as a memorial.[8] The inscriptions on both headstones are identical thus substantiating this possibility. But the reality is not lost on all who view her final resting place, for as her mother was enslaved, so was Ann, even in death.

(Boston: W.B. Clarke Co., 1910) 183.

6 Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, (London: T. Lownudes, 1774), 457, 502

7 Henning Cohen, "Slave Names in Colonial South Carolina," *American Speech*. Vol. 27, No. 2, 1952. 103-104. I will further discuss the practice of renaming enslaved girls in Jamaica in chapter four.

8 See: http://www.dorchesteratheneum.org/page.php?id=3976. This notion was put forth by the Dorchester Atheneum.

Hundreds of thousands of African girls were subjected to the brutal disruption of their lives due to the forced captivity and transfer of their young bodies away from their beloved West African homelands. The activities of women have always existed in plantation records, statistical data sources, inventories, newspapers, colonial correspondences, court records, and the texts, diaries and journals generated by both male and female writers.[9] The same can be said of infant, toddler, prepubescent and adolescent girls. Their silence, and erasure, is deafening, their accounts left to languish in the depths of the archive in favor of the male experience. With the lack of written personal accounts by women in the eighteenth century, historians of slavery and gender have confronted the question of "how" to bring forth the lives of African women and their daughters from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries; the buried and silenced narratives of lives that have been deliberately disrupted by colonial undertakings and at times, the archivist's cataloging methods.[10] To borrow a question from Katherine McKittrick, "how," as scholars, "do we think, write, share and foster a commitment to acknowledging violence and undoing its persistent frame rather than simply analytically reprising violence?"[11] Can we attune ourselves to listen for and respect the "groans and cries and the undecipherable songs" of African children enslaved, shackled and sold in the Americas?[12] Can we "conjur[e] something new from the absence of Africans as humans" when there are wounds, deep fissures and total erasures in the narrative?[13] As historians, we are tasked with being very critical of the archive, utilizing nuanced methodologies to eke out the accounts that history has relegated to the ether of a colonial past. This history has rendered African girls silent, "a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural

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9 Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd, "Introduction," in Lucille Mathurine Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica: 1655-1844,* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), ix-xxx

10 See: Cecily Jones "Suffer the Little Children: Setting a Research Agenda for the Study of Enslaved Children in the Caribbean Colonial World," *Wadabagei*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2006, 7-26. Jennifer L. Morgan, "Archives and Histories of Racial Capitalism: An Afterword" *Social Text*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (125), Dec. 2015. 153-161 and Marissa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives,* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 2016).
Katherine McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," *The Black Scholar,* Vol. 44, Number 2, Summer 2014. 18

12 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, Volume 12, No. 2 June 2008, 3

13 Ibid., 3, See also M. NourbeSe Phillip, *Zong!* (Toronto: Mercury Press, 2008)

body."[14] In other words, the African girl's existence in Africa and the Americas was one predicated upon space, labor, language, and bondage, stripped of her humanness for the bare labor her young body could provide.

A close reading of Olaudah Equiano's memoir, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African,* published in 1789, ignited a query into the fate of the African abolitionist's younger sister who was kidnapped alongside him. This dissertation uses the question of "what happened to Equiano's sister?" as a metaphor to examine girlhood in West Africa, the entry of girls into the domestic and transatlantic slave trade and their subsequent fates in the British Atlantic from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. I contend that sub-Saharan slavery, as practiced by early modern Europeans, was influenced by the Islamic world, and later envisioned through the body of an African woman, a "Black Mooress," as Portuguese traders, in the fifteenth century, sought to acquire sub-Saharan African captives to take back to Lisbon. During the sixteenth century, the English sought to insert themselves into the lucrative Portuguese African trade. The next century under the auspices of trading companies, the English would broker treaties with African leaders for exclusive commercial and land rights to establish trading posts. This often led to conflicts with other European factions seeking to control trade in the same region. Although the English would make Cape Coast Castle in the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) their administrative center at the end of the seventeenth century, it is pertinent to comprehend that the English and their Anglo-American cousins utilized commercial networks established in other regions of West Africa to acquire captive Africans and specifically captive African women and girls. A query of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) from 1700-1800 shows the highest numbers of women and girls transported to British colonies in the Americas derived from the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra, and West Central Africa. Smaller numbers of captive women and girls were transported from the Gold Coast, Senegambia,

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[14] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1992), 10

and Sierra Leone.[15] But these numbers are illusory, affected by the various definitions of girlhood and womanhood British captains and merchants utilized when commodifying the female captive. For the British, a child was defined by height – four feet, four inches. But a woman was defined either by bodily hair or the onset of menses. Therefore, a ten-year-old girl who had begun to menstruate was defined as a "woman-girl" in countless ship manifests and ledgers. The fact that she may or may not have gone through the rites of passage that would usher her into womanhood, as defined by her specific African society and culture, had no bearing.

An Interdisciplinary Methodology

To comprehend the bonded lives of African girls and transatlantic slavery, historical inquiries are paired with Africana methodologies to imagine the possibilities when geography is considered. "The relationship between black populations and geography allows us to engage with a narrative that locates and draws on black histories and black subjects to make visible social lives which are often displaced [and] rendered ungeographic." Changing polities in West Africa responding to the Atlantic trade caused a shift in women's economic, spiritual, and communal roles, forcing women to redefine themselves and the roles they played in girls' lives when European influences prefaced masculine authority. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Cross River region of the Bight of Biafra during the eighteenth century when the Aro confederacy came into prominence and dominated the trade in captive bodies, with Europeans, along the Atlantic coast. The result was an increase of African females into transatlantic slavery from this region.

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15 From 1791 to 1800, English and New England merchants turned their sights to the growing sugar industry in Cuba, spurred by the Saint Domingue Revolution. For example, in 1794, a joint venture between Massachusetts and Rhode Island merchants financed the voyage of the *Ascension* to Mozambique, thus opening a new market for African captives, traded by Portuguese, Luso-African and African merchants. Fifty percent of the captive Africans acquired were children, the numbers split evenly between girls and boys. Women only accounted for ten percent of captives. See: TSTD #36590.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century legislation passed by Parliament that favored English merchants and contributed to the defining of enslaved Africans as chattel property contributed to the differing realities of enslaved African girls in the British Atlantic, subjecting them to urban and rural spaces dominated by white masculine and feminine racial mappings and the institution of bondage. Moreover, English law allowed many British and Anglo-American widows to yield power over the lives of African girls and they responded by resisting in several ways. Hence, when space and place are conceived as fixed, Black geographies, and all that it is inclusive of, are interpreted as non-existent. Black geographies, however, are fluid, defying the often predetermined "boundaries, color lines and proper spaces" prescribed by their social condition.[16]

Because we cannot see space as a social product, there exists an illusion of transparency. "Space appears luminous, as intelligible as giving action free rein."[17] However, "we are confronted by an indefinite multitude of spaces, each one piled upon, or perhaps contained, within the next: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, and global."[18] For African girls in the Americas, the relationship between space and their physical realities confronts the biases of the archive and brings to the fore their experiences which are often displaced and considered immobile. Knowledge can also be considered as space where the enslaved clings to her subjecthood and acts upon her bonded condition. [19] For example, early Caribbean and American periodicals are filled with ads for girls who have run away, freeing themselves from the harsh reality of chattel slavery. Hence, space is inclusive of action. When considered together, physical space is indistinguishable

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16 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), x

17 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 29

18 Ibid., 8

19 Michel Foucault and Alan Sheridan, *Archeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 172

from social space and mental space. When space is contextualized as a site for knowledge production, the African female body can also be considered as a space where the revulsions of slavery are exposed, and the African spiritual body, is a site of historical memory.

Continuing with the assertion of space as a site of knowledge production, my research process has become more receptive to the present and past geographies of African girls and their descendants in the British colonies. From the West African coast to the bustling streets of London, to the colonial resting place of those early souls brought to New England, and the rich, undulating landscape of St. Peter's parish in the north of Barbados where the remnants of sugar cane cultivation still exist, the memory of enslaved girls haunt the living. There is no doubt that this examination has greatly benefited from the extensive knowledge of archivists and librarians as well as the physical and digital materials found at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Newport Historical Society, John Carter Brown Library, John Hay Library, Bernieke Library, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, South Carolina Historical Society, Barbados National Archives, Barbados National Library, National Library of Jamaica, National Archives Kew, and National Maritime Museum London. But sitting in a reading room and pouring over the documents brought out by archivists pales in comparison to the experience of doing historical research in the field, an experience that moves beyond the written page to consider the historical legacy of a place viewed in plain sight and resulting in a visceral reaction to the memory and remembrance of transatlantic slavery and colonialism. Outside of the brick-and-mortar repository, travelling the same paths of the enslaved, resulted in a comprehension of the "spectacularly transgressive cultural practices" juxtaposed against the historical and the everyday lives that are often overlooked.[20] I was first struck by this awareness while doing research in Barbados, taking in the landscape and the remnants of the island's colonial past while driving around the island. As I drove northward, the discordant noise

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[20] Shalini Puri, "Finding the Field: Notes on Caribbean Cultural Criticism, Area Studies, and the Forms of Engagement," *Small Axe*, Vo. 17, No. 2, July 2013 (No. 41), 70.

of midday traffic in Bridgetown gave way to the blanketed quiet of the lush rural vegetation of St. Peter's and later, the rugged, arid landscape of St. Lucy's. In between expanses of land, small, picturesque villages sprung from the earth, some with vibrantly painted modified chattel houses framed by hibiscus bushes and other tropical flora. These villages, ringing large expanses of land, are the remnants of slave quarters that served the once prosperous sugar estates, animal pens and farms from two centuries ago. Shelani Puri has articulated her own experience with being present with the past while conducting research in Grenada. This interdisciplinary methodology, this "fieldwork in the humanities;" is a nuanced methodology that sits at the intersection of anthropology and history. It is a necessary approach that prefaces local history and memory over colonial documentation and scholarship that is solely based on written (and often biased) colonial resources.[21] Moreover, Edourd Glissant reminds us, in his work, *Poetics of Relation*, that landscape is not merely a setting, but a character implicated in the action.[22] Hence, God's Little Acre in Newport, Rhode Island, as well as the many places in the British colonies that became centers for the slave trade - New York, Charleston, Bridgetown and Kingston, to name a few, lie at the crossroads of the British transatlantic slave trade. Where captive souls from Africa, the Caribbean and southern colonies converged and entered a social schema dependent upon the economies of slavery and the submission of their black bodies.

As European maritime explorers ventured down the west African coast, they encountered states and kingdoms where communities of enslaved and free people thrived. Bondage, whether in its various conventions on the African continent or as practiced by the English in their American colonies, involved some sort of coercive labor. For African females transported to the Americas, this labor was physical, sexual, and reproductive. The enslavement of African girls, and their role as workers in the British Atlantic centered on the indoctrination, assimilation and control exuded by both male and female enslavers. These mechanisms were in addition to the

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21 Ibid.

22 Edourd Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsey Wing, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 71.

lucrative profits to be made from their labor and defies the notion that the labor produced by children and adolescents was valueless.[23] Whether on plantations in the West Indies or the southern colonies, or in domestic service and specialized trades in the northern colonies, African girls and their American counterparts were a source of labor that fulfilled enslavers' specific needs; as an additional source, or to replace older enslaved individuals. Hence, girls who entered the world of British colonial labor were stripped of their humanness and became an integral part of a wider enslaved (and sometimes free) community because of the work they could provide.[24]As a result, enslaved girls would become the foundation of a future enslaved labor force, whether by their own travails or by birthing progeny that carried the stigma of bondage because of a mother's enslaved condition.

Still, I propose that an often-overlooked consequence of the labor African girls provided was the retention of African traditions and culture thus contributing to the formation of a unique African / African American identity throughout the British Atlantic. Like adults who arrived in England and her colonies in the Americas, African girls arrived empty handed, not empty headed and therefore viewed their new temporalities through an African spiritual and cosmological lens. When considering the spiritual and cultural facets of their lives, we can begin to comprehend the multiple avenues of resiliency and resistance that allowed African girls to navigate a new world of British colonial slavery, constantly and meticulously recreating kinship networks and reinventing themselves to sustain lives of meaning that defied prescriptions of race, commodification, and bondage.

As the early modern world grew wider from exploration and trade, accounts written by travelers and explorers fueled the imaginations of Europeans. For early modern Europeans, reading was an embodied experience, one that involved the body and soul, and affected their

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23 Charles A. Wash Jr. "Enslaved Children in Urban and Rural Bahia, Brazil, 1822-1888, PhD diss., (Howard University, 2008), 3

24 Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 21.

quotidian lives. Deeper still, reading was a humoral event involving the blood and spirits of the body. The act of reading not only changed your thoughts, but it also changed who you essentially were. Classical lore, biblical texts and local myths contributed to an apotheosis, casting the European in a virtuous, supremacist light and the African female as the fantastical other. She was beautiful, her ebony hue attracting the most discerning eye, and yet grotesque, her body and lush features compared to the beasts and monsters that haunted the European imaginary. She was immaculate, and yet at the same time profane, often blamed for the sexual violence inflicted upon her. As more Europeans encountered African females, they wrote about them, often in disparaging tones and juxtaposed against European perceptions of beauty.

Iberian, and later English, coffers began to fill from the sale of African bodies. At the same time, the language of blackness, that mutable trait that affected Europeans and Africans alike, morphed into a racialized habitude equating the African with the slave. "Oppressive language," the late Toni Morrison cautioned, "does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge."[25] Language is a conduit of information and thus intersects with space. "At any given moment a language is stratified not only into dialects in the strict sense of the word, …, but is… stratified as well into languages that are socio-ideological: languages belonging to professions, to genres, languages peculiar to particular generations, etc."[26] Language is produced through social interactions, and in the case of the institution of slavery, through the commodification of African bodies, colonial legislation and both religious and secular texts. A singular language centered on race and slavery gives expression to rhetoric that works toward a central verbal and ideological discourse; that all Africans, and their descendants, are synonymous with inferiority and perpetual servitude. At the close of the eighteenth century, the fervency of the American Revolution and abolitionist debates

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25 Toni Morrison, "Nobel Lecture, 1993" *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2014

26 Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, Michael Holquist, ed., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 271-272

would impel Africans and African Americans to challenge the language and institution of slavery in England and the British colonies, as well as in the new republic of the United States.

There are parts of the British Atlantic where African retentions are more pronounced due to the constant influx of Africans into specific regions - like the Caribbean and sea islands off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida - due to the absentee nature of planters in these regions, as well as the flight of Africans to thriving maroon communities. Here, two obverse dialogues based on numeracy run parallel to each other; the first dealing with the numbers of girls transferred to the British colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There are scholars, like Stephanie Smallwood who argue that children were just smatterings of human cargo filled by agents of the Royal African Company in the Gold Coast.[27] However, this argument ignores the activities of the Royal African Company in other regions along the West African coast, as well as the whim of the trader or sea captain in their classification and commodification of who was a child and who was an adult. Therefore, the actual physical numbers of girls transported to the British colonies are obscured.

Nevertheless, the physical numbers of captive girls parallel the second dialogue centered on numeracy and the burgeoning economies of the Atlantic trade. Jennifer L. Morgan suggests that numeracy, "the fluency in the concepts of trade and exchange … was one of the new modes of thinking" in the Atlantic world.[28] As the demand for African labor increased in the British colonies, African polities responded thus inserting themselves into the Atlantic economy based on the trade of captive bodies. African women and girls were forced into the Atlantic trade where they became subjected to the violence of abstraction; a notation on a ledger page, commodified and traded for cloth, rum, and beads.[29] This notion grew during the eighteenth century when New England merchants became more involved in the business of slavery, and the Bight of Biafra

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27 Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007), 164-165.

28 Jennifer L. Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship and Capitalism in the Black Atlantic*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 12-13.

29 See: Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 12

became a leader in the exportation of enslaved women and girls to the Americas. In contrast, credit, became the preferred method of payment for captive African bodies during the eighteenth century, thus leading to Parliamentary legislation that favored merchants and further defined the enslaved African as property.

Legally defined as chattel, the lives of enslaved African girls in the early British Atlantic have been left to languish in the depths of the colonial archive in favor of the male experience. Equiano's popular memoir, published in 1789, finds company with fellow Black Londoner, Ignatius Sancho, who was born on a Spanish slaving vessel and taken to England at the age of two. Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, like Equiano, was a member of the Sons of Africa, a Black abolitionist group in London who railed against slavery. Cugoano, also known as John Smith, was born in the Gold Coast, and enslaved at the age of thirteen. He was first taken to Grenada, then purchased by a merchant who took him to England where he was freed. In 1787, encouraged by Equiano, Cugoano published *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*.[30] Broteer Furro was also born in the Gold Coast. As a young boy he was taken to Anomabo and purchased by Robinson Mumford, a New England seaman and farmer. Furro was purchased for four gallons of rum and some calico cloth and renamed "Venture" because of the auspicious sale. In 1798, his memoir, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America,* was published in Connecticut.[31]

It was not until the nineteenth century that personal narratives by formerly enslaved women, that detail their experience of enslavement and freedom, were published. Mary Prince, who was born in Bermuda in 1788, was encouraged by Thomas Pringle, a Scottish abolitionist, to tell her story while living in London. In 1831, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave.*

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30 Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species,* London, 1787

31 Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America, Related by Himself*, New London: C. Holt. 1798.

Related by Herself, became the first narrative produced by a Black woman in Britain. Meanwhile in North Carolina, Harriet Jacobs spent seven years hiding in a crawlspace in her grandmother's house to protest the sexual advances and the sale of her children by her enslaver, James Norcom. After her escape and subsequent trip to England as a nanny, Jacobs was inspired to write her memoir, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Her first attempt at publishing her memoir in London was unsuccessful, so Jacobs travelled to Boston where she found a captive audience. Her memoir was published in Boston in 1861.[32]

African Girlhood, English Girlhood

Because the lives of enslaved African girls in the British colonies are silenced or rendered vague, this examination queries their African origins and the events occurring in West Africa at the time of their captivity and subsequent transference to the Americas. Geoffrey Parrinder, in the early 1960's, sought to dispute the scholarship that defined Africans as static and primitive. Through a comparative study of the spiritual beliefs and practices of the Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Igbo and related subgroups, Parrinder highlights the complex political and spiritual practices of the aforementioned groups and their deeply entwined ideologies that affect social and communal spheres and the lives of children through religious rites.[33] John Mbiti expands upon Parrinder's scholarship by examining African ways of being in his seminal work, *African Religions and Philosophy*, first published in 1969 and reprinted in 1999. Mbiti challenges the notion that African traditional religion and thought was "demonic and anti-Christian."[34] He explains that a study of African religious systems is "ultimately a study of the peoples themselves in all the

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[32] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, ed. By L. Maria Child. Boston, 1861. The first publication of Harriet Jacob's account, in London was unsuccessful. She found a captive audience when she traveled to Boston. That same year her brother, John S. Jacobs, published his own account, *A True Tale of Slavery*, in *The Leisure Hour*, a weekly periodical in London.

[33] Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples.* [2d ed., completely rewritten, rev. and enl.] London: Epworth Press, 1961.

[34] John S. Mbiti, "The Encounter of Christian Faith and African Religion," *Christian Century*, (August 27-September 3, 1980), 817-820.

complexities of both traditional and modern life."[35] Children are essential to African ways of being. "A child not only continues the physical line of life … but becomes the intensely religious focus of keeping the parents in their state of personal immortality. The physical aspects of birth and the ceremonies that might accompany pregnancy, birth, and childhood, are regarded with religious feeling and experience - that another religious being has been born into a profoundly religious community and religious world."[36] Children are also regarded with spiritual reverence because they are believed to be the reincarnation of ancestors or lineage spirits. It is up to the community to "protect the child, feed it, bring it up, educate it and in many other ways incorporate it into the wider community."[37] When African girls reached puberty, between the ages of ten and thirteen, they were ushered into the sacred realm of women through elaborate rituals and lessons that would ultimately prepare them for womanhood. Once completed they were introduced to the larger community. Douglas E. Thomas continues Mbiti's work by offering a more feminist approach, calling attention to the historical role of women as a spiritual and economic force within their African and new American communities.[38] Nevertheless, from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, wars, dept pawnage, kidnappings and environmental factors tore apart communities and families as girls were transported to plantations and servitude on the African coast, or to the Americas to labor on farms and plantations, as well as in the homes of wealthy businessmen, merchants and planters. However, many did not forget the lessons they were taught or the cherished communities they were torn from.

In contrast, in the field of childhood studies scholars have relied on the scholarship of Phillip Ariés as a seminal foundation to examine European childhood. His book, *Enfant et la vie familial sous l'Ancien Regime* or *Centuries of Childhood*, first published in 1960, sought to comprehend European childhood and the formation of the family from the Middle Ages to the

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35 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), 1.
36 Ibid., 120.
37 Ibid., 110.
38 Douglas E. Thomas, *African Traditional Religion in the Modern World*, second edition, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2015), 5-7

nineteenth century. The long durée of Ariès' study "serves as a reference point for studies situated almost anywhere within the Western past."[39] Here it is critical to note that this "western past" is void of the experiences of enslaved African children in Europe and Europe's colonies in the Americas. By examining medieval and early modern texts, religious and scenic paintings and portraiture, children's fashions, and the naming practices of families where the names of deceased children were utilized in subsequent births, Aries concludes that the concept of childhood did not exist in the medieval period. As mercantilism gave way to individualistic capitalistic ventures, ideas about European childhood and family evolved. Childhood was then contextualized as a social construct derived from the common understanding of human biology. Aries, who refers to the medieval text, *Le Grand Propriétaire de toutes choses*, lists the seven stages of childhood that correspond to the planets. The first stage of childhood is the infant stage when "the teeth are planted."[40] The second is the "puerita," because the child is still like the "pupil of the eye."[41] This stage lasts until age fourteen and is marked by a child's introduction into the adult world. Adolescence follows which lasts until the age of twenty-one but can go on until the age of thirty-five.[42] This is the stage when individuals begin having their own children. Youth follows adolescence, which is then followed by senectitude, a period between youth and old age, the final stage.[43]

Israeli historian Shulasmith Shahar, who draws on the scholarship of child developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, disagrees with Aries. In her work, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, Shahar contends that childhood did exist in the medieval period. After the stage of early childhood, from ages two to seven, middle childhood is the period between the ages of seven and twelve, the stage of "concrete intellectual operations and of moral and social feelings

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39 Adrian Wilson. "The Infancy of the History of Childhood: An Appraisal of Phillipe Aries," *History and Theory*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Feb. 1980), 137.

40 Phillip Aries, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 21-22.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid

43 Ibid

of cooperation."[44] Adolescence, followed and is known as" the stage of abstract intellectual operations," as well as when an individual enters the "society of adults." [45] At the dawn of the modern period, adolescence became gendered and influenced by social standing. Boys of the working class were given their own flocks to tend or entered apprenticeships for skilled trades while boys from elite families began their training for the knighthood or entered apprenticeships with affluent merchants and professionals. Girls, of the working class, like their male counterparts, also entered into apprenticeships for the skilled trades. But girls from elite families only one option, marriage. As the decades of the eighteenth wore on, the notion of "young lady hood" would emerge, a period of social and cultural transformation comparable to the same period for boys.[46] Education and religious instruction became differentiating markers for childhood and social class and hence, social advancement and economic change influenced ideas about childhood and the family beginning in the fourteenth century and remained fixed until the late eighteenth century. Furthermore, girlhood, like womanhood, became protected and subservient to white male authority. For enslaved Africans, however, the European notion of family and childhood did not apply, and captive African girls, for the most part, were not as cherished as their white counterparts.[47]

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44 Shulasmith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Routeledge, 1990), 35

45 Ibid.

46 Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, "Chapter One: Tween Culture Within Girlhood Studies." *Counterpoints*, Vol.245 (2005), 9.

47 Here I argue that the consideration of class among the British complicates the matter of protected childhood / girlhood. For example, On March 26, 1609, Hugh Lee, the English consul residing in Lisbon, excitedly penned a letter to Thomas Wilson, a clerk in the Exchequer and a member of the Virginia Company. The Sunday past, he witnessed five carracks, bound for the East Indies, making their way along the Tagus River. However, instead of soldiers, the vessels were laden with merchandise and children, ages ten and up. The Portuguese believed their young bodies were better suited for the climate of the Indian subcontinent. It is not known if these children were African or Portuguese. Nevertheless, Lee thought the English should follow suit, using child labor in the new Virginia colony in the Americas. Supported by King James I, poor children in London were rounded up and transported to the Americas. Boys twelve and up became apprentices until the age of twenty-one. Girls were also apprenticed until the age of twenty-one, or until they married. See: "The Virginia Company requests the mayor, aldermen, and council of the City of London to send one hundred children to Virginia, 1619," in Susan M. Kingsbury, ed., *The Records of the Virginia Company of London. The Court Book, from the Manuscript in the Library of Congress, I* (Washington, 1906), 270-271, "The Virginia Company requests authority to coerce

Scholarship

The journal of *Slavery and Abolition* published a special issue centered on children in European systems of bondage in 2006 as a follow-up to an exclusive publication focusing on women and slavery. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph C. Miller note that even in the Americas, most of the enslaved were women and children. But most of the scholarship on slavery has imagined children as fully formed "slaves" rather than developing human beings under the severe constraints of bondage. Contributions to this special edition form a foundation for the study of African children and Transatlantic slavery and intersect themes centered on the British slave trade, and the health of enslaved and free(d) children in nineteenth century Barbados. What is missing from the edition is an examination of the various ways children, and specifically girls, came to be enslaved. In 2003, Paul Lovejoy and Toyin Falola edited the volume, *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa* that explores debt pawnage and trade in West Africa, specifically among the Yoruba, Asante, Edo and Mende peoples. Lovejoy revisits the concept of pawnage, in his 2014 article, "Pawnship, Debt, and 'Freedom' in Atlantic Africa During the Era of the Slave Trade: A Reassessment," clarifying the relationship between pawnage and African coastal economies and the blurred relationship between a "pawn," a person held in bondage until a debt was paid, and a "slave."

For European merchants acquiring captives on the African coast, slavery and pawnship inhabited a contentious space of forced labor, with pawnship only occurring for a specific time, but not always honorably practices by Europeans. On the other hand, slavery in West Africa did not exist in the same manner as transatlantic slavery. In his memoir, Olaudah Equiano describes the position of slaves and the practice of slavery in his Igbo village. He notes, "... [the enslaved]

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children of London to go to Virginia, 1620," Sir Edwin Sandys to Sir Robert Naunton, principal secretary of James I, Jan. 28, 1620, in VA. Co. Records, III (1933), 259. "The Privy Council grants the Virginia Company authority to coerce children, 1620," *Great Britain, Privy Council, Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1619-1621* (London, 1930), 118.

do no more work than other members of the community, than even their master; their food, clothing and lodging, were nearly the same as theirs, except that they were not permitted to eat with those who were free born …"[48] Hence, the institution of slavery on the continent differed greatly between kingdoms and states and especially from the practice of chattel slavery practiced by Europeans in the Americas. Moreover, the term "slave" does not do justice to describe the various servile positions individuals found themselves in African societies. Although a form of bondage existed, it coexisted with other types of labor, including serfdom (where people were tied to the land and were customarily obligated to a ruler or chief), clientage (voluntary subordination without a fixed compensation for services), pawnage (labor was perceived as interest on a debt), communal work (often based on kinship and age grade and was perceived as reciprocal based on past or future exchange) and wage labor.[49] John Thornton, argues that European trade in Africa was not "forced" and takes issue with scholars who view the continent as underdeveloped and thus forced into trade exchanging raw materials and African bodies for manufactured European goods.[50] African states and kingdoms have engaged in commerce for centuries. The arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century and the response of African polities shifting from the Saharan trade to the Atlantic trade resulted in a new chapter in the long history of commerce on the continent. Narratives that suggest otherwise, centering European exploration and trade while undermining African agency is biased and misleading.

In the past, scholars of Africa and the Transatlantic slave trade have relied on the quantitative data first put forth by Phillip Curtin in 1969, and expanded upon by David Eltis, that would manifest into the growing, sophisticated Transatlantic Slave Trade Database. These first calculations are proving to be arbitrary as the data on slavery and the slave trade continues to be thoroughly examined and expanded upon by scholars. Although not as large as the numbers of

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48 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano,* 18

49 See: Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

50 John Thornton, *Africa, and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 45.

adults, the numbers of children, both boys and girls that were transported from the Gold Coast to the Americas by the British were significant, but not as great as the numbers of children transported from other regions. Stephanie Smallwood suggests these small numbers were due to the need of captains to fill cargo quotas and thus, children, and the elderly, were used in this regard. However, the understanding of the reason behind the low numbers of captive girls transported from the Gold Coast becomes more complex once the traditions and the gendered culture of the various African states in the Gold Coast are considered. This includes the matrilineal Akan and its subgroups, the Fante, Asante, Denkyira and Nzema, to name a few, as well as non-Akan groups like the Ga-Dangle, Ewe, Kusasi and Mamprusi. This consideration also involves examining England's activities in other regions of West Africa, like the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra and West Central Africa where the market prices for women and girls were more advantageous and therefore taken advantage of by English and Anglo-American captains and merchants. Whereas Stephanie Smallwood looks at the British in the Gold Coast through the activities of the Royal African Company, Sowande Mustakeem, in her work *Slavery at Sea* (2016) considers the "contentious seaborne spaces" to explore the "social conditions and human costs of maritime slavery."[51] Within this context Mustakeem examines the capture and captivity of infants and children with a focus on trauma, abandonment, sickness and death. But like Stephanie Smallwood before her, captive infants and children are treated as part of the whole, meaning, as part of the study of the experience of captive adults. Although both historians offer rich and engaging interventions on Transatlantic slavery, when it comes to the experience of girls and the Middle Passage, more research is needed to fully comprehend their experience, on their own terms, during the Atlantic crossing and the fear, violence and trauma that accompanied such a distressing event.

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[51] Sowande Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex and Sickness in the Middle Passage*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 3

The British laid claim to the island of Barbados in 1625. By 1640, any African brought to the island was declared a slave by law. The same would apply to the island of Jamaica in 1655 after the English wrestled the island from the Spanish, and the other British West Islands of St. Kitts (1623), Nevis (1628) Antigua (1632), Montserrat (1632), and Tortola (1672). In the British sugar islands, girls were seen as sources of physical, sexual, and reproductive labor. Planters adopted strategies for importing younger captives and legislation was passed to ensure a lifetime of bondage for the enslaved and any child born to an enslaved mother. In studies of the British Caribbean the collective examination of women, children and slave families is common. The works of Barbara Bush, Lucille Mathurin Mair, Hilary Beckles, David Barry Gaspar and Verene Shepherd form the foundational canon of women's history in the British Caribbean. But few scholars have touched upon African girlhood, African spirituality and the intellectual currents surrounding gender and slavery in Africa that led to the enslavement of African girls in the Caribbean and broader British Atlantic and thus treat the subject of children as a whole or in conjunction with the familial structure. For example, Sheila Marie Aird's dissertation, *The Forgotten Ones: Enslaved Children in Caribbean Societies, 1673-1838,* published in 2006, examines the lives of African, creole and mulatto children and suggests that enslaved children contributed to the emergence, development, and expansion of the Caribbean plantation system. Colleen Vasconcellos' work, *Slavery, Childhood and Abolition in Jamaica, 1788-1838,* published in 2015, examines the experiences of enslaved children through the "lenses of family, resistance, race, status, culture, education and freedom."[52] Vasconcellos notes that studies of slavery rarely included the experiences of children. The first, however, was Gilberto Freyre's *The Master's and the Slaves* published in 1945. Freyre devotes two chapters to the examination of enslaved children within the larger context of slavery in Brazil and discusses the contentious relationship between enslaved mothers and children, as well as the fraught relationship between white children and

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[52] Colleen A. Vasconcellos, *Slavery, Childhood and Abolition in Jamaica, 1788-1838,* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 5-8

enslaved children. Freyre asserts that enslaved children suffered as much as enslaved adults and that they were aware of their bonded status. They were nothing more than "chattel or a toy for cruel white children;" a notion that wreaked havoc on their young psyches.[53] This echoes the current work of Sandra E. Greene. In her study of African children, slavery and social death, Greene asserts that the study of African children and slavery should be interdisciplinary and include psychological studies and an examination of the history of emotions.[54] Like the tendrils of a robust vine, these interdisciplinary methods allow for the expansion of the historical discipline and the theories surrounding social death, natal alienation and trauma by considering the enslaved girl and her reaction to her bonded reality in a strange new world.

Unlike the scholarship on enslaved children in the British Caribbean, the scholarship on enslaved children in New England during the colonial era is lacking. Catherine Adams' and Elizabeth Pleck's comprehensive, *Love of Freedom,* offers a feminist view of life for African American women in the northern colonies before the American Revolution. However, Adams and Pleck do not devote separate chapters to the experience of enslaved or free Black girls. James Marten's *Childhood in Colonial America,* published in 2007, examines childhood through an Atlantic lens. In the case of colonial North America, Marten looks at the life of Venture Smith who was purchased in the Gold Coast at the age of six and brought to New England. On the same farm where he lived was an enslaved girl named Meg. Venture does not offer insight into her life, only that he later married her at the age of twenty-two.[55] *The Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley, a Native African and a Slave,* was written by Margaretta Matilda Odell in 1834. Odell's account should be read with a critical eye since it was written some years after Wheatley-Peter's death and the familial relationship between Odell and Mrs. Susannah Wheatley is

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53 Gilberto Freyre, and Samuel Putnam. *The Masters and the Slaves (Casa-Grande & Senzala): A Study In the Development of Brazilian Civilization*. (New York: Knopf, 1946.)

54 Sandra E. Greene, "(Child) Slavery in Africa as Social Death," in *On Human bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, John P. Bodel and Walter Scheidel, eds. (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 210.

55 Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa*, 16

questionable. Moreover, the account is written with the ideal of abolition in mind, romanticizing, with broad strokes, Peter's childhood and the benevolent white colonists who had her best interests at heart.[56]

Where the scholarship on enslaved children during the colonial era is lacking, the scholarship on enslaved children during the antebellum era offers some insight into the historical legacy of their enslaved experiences. Wilma King, like Gilberto Freyre in the 1940s, argues that enslaved children in the South were very aware of their propertied status and therefore did not have the opportunity to have a childhood like their white counterparts. This was in part due the labor children had to perform as well as the separation from family and the violence they suffered at the hands of unrelenting enslavers. This is evident in the life of a young Frederick Douglass who became acutely aware of his bonded status at an early age.[57] As a result of the trauma of enslavement, vulnerability, violence, and sexual exploitation they experienced; enslaved children aged prematurely. This statement can also be applied to African girls during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Enslaved girls were very aware of their bonded status and reacted either by running away, stopping, and interfering with the flow of work or turned inward and committed bodily harm to themselves as their young psyches fractured under the oppressing chains of bondage and exploitation.

Birthed from the scholarship that ignited the Black feminist movement, Black Girlhood Studies offers an inroad for scholars to claim space for Black girls within the academy. As Ruth Nicole Brown states, "not only are Black girls worthy of our intellectual, artistic and political labor, they also have something in turn to teach us, that they could, if we listened, change the world."[58] Thus, the field continues to grow with works centered on the nineteenth and twentieth

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56 To honor Phillis Wheatley Peters, I use her married name, "Peters," a name she has chosen for herself.

57 See: "Chapter One" in Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself*, (Boston, Anti-Slavery Office, 1845). Project Gutenberg

58 Tammy C. Owens, Durrell M. Callierm Jessica L. Robinson and Porshe R. Garner, "Towards an

centuries, like Abosede George's *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor and Social Development in Twentieth Century Colonial Lagos* (2014), LaKeisha Simmons' *Crescent City Girls, The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (2015) and Nazira Sadiq Wright's *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* (2016). In June 2017, Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake and Thalia Gonzales published their collaborative report, "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood." Their findings, supported by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, explores troubling contemporary issues like the adultification of young Black girls and the biased legislation that is continuously enacted against them in schools and judicial courts in the United States. For this reason, I draw on the Akan spirit of Sankofa, reaching back into the sixteenth century to understand the social constructions of race, the institution of slavery and Black girlhood in the white imaginary that foregrounds the state of Black Girlhood today.

Chapter Outline

"In Search of Equiano's Sister" offers a historical glimpse of African girlhood, affected by transatlantic slavery from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in the British Atlantic. Chapter one begins with the death of the Prophet Muhammed in 632 AD. I contend that his death was the catalyst for the spread of Islam across North Africa and into Portugal and Spain thus affecting both social and cultural traditions in the Iberian Peninsula, including the practice of slavery that affected the lives women and girls from sub-Sharan Africa. These traditions from the Islamic world would later influence Iberians as they ventured down the African coast and encountered Africans who they considered infidels. One of the first individuals enslaved south of the Sahara by the Portuguese was an African woman. Through her captivity the Portuguese racially marked her body as available and commodifiable. As the trade in captive African bodies increased,

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Interdisciplinary Field of Black Girlhood Studies" *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 117. See also Ruth Nicole Brown, *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang, 2009.

overland trade routes leading through the Sahara, into North Africa and the Mediterranean gave way to European maritime trade along the west African Atlantic coast. In the sixteenth century, the English would enter the Atlantic stage thus disrupting the Portuguese monopoly on West African trade, as well as the commercial relations that have existed between Portugal and England since the twelfth century.

New encounters and written accounts about contact with the peoples of Africa and the Americas spurred the imaginations of individuals in England. In turn, the English populace mentally and physically absorbed these writings and drew upon classical and religious discourses to signify difference, a practice I call the "reading body," juxtaposed against the racialized fantastical African woman. In chapter two I continue to expound upon this "othering" of African girls resulting in their becoming lavish objects of empire for the wealthy. As gifts bestowed to English wives and mistresses, beauty and sovereignty become uniquely interwoven in the English quest for Atlantic dominance, colonization in the Americas and trade in Africa.

By the eighteenth century, the English secured their role as a naval and colonizing power. The Royal African Company, founded in 1660 and financed by the monarchy and London financiers, helped acquire African bodies for labor on estates and farms in the burgeoning colonies of the Americas. Scholars who have researched England's activities in West Africa have mainly focused upon the Gold Coast where the British established an administrative center at Cape Coast Castle. However, an examination of the records of the Royal African Company, as well as previous and subsequent trading companies, reveal a broader trading network that included the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra, and West Central Africa. Therefore, chapter three focuses on the Bight of Biafra, the birthplace of Olaudah Equiano and his younger sister, its changing polities and paramount role in the enslavement and transference of African girls to the West Indies and North America.

Chapter four continues the Atlantic trajectory of the previous chapter and traces the path of enslavement from the Bight of Biafra, the Middle Passage, and to the island of Jamaica. Unlike

Barbados where there was a lack of arable land, Jamaica provided an avenue for the average British man to shirk the confines of a classist English society to become independently wealthy. This is evident in the life of Thomas Thistlewood, who went to Jamaica to seek his fortune, starting as an overseer then investing in his own plantation. The women and girls he enslaved became entangled in his web of bondage, sexual violence and mental anguish. But Thistlewood was not alone in his treatment of the girls he owned, for white women would also laud their own brand of power over the girls and women they enslaved, thus benefitting from their physical, sexual, and reproductive labor.

An example of the power white women displayed over those they enslaved can be viewed through the life of young Phillis Wheatley Peters. The final chapter of "In Search of Equiano's Sister" examines the life of the young poetess from a different perspective, considering events in Senegambia that center on Islamic conversion and the enslavement of those who resisted. As with Native American children in New England, some New England colonists looked upon African children as civilizing projects, introducing them to education and religion while still holding them in bondage. It is evident that a young Phillis Wheatley Peters held a unique position within the Wheatley household for she was not allowed to socialize with the other enslaved individuals who labored for the Wheatleys. As a point of contrast, a case involving a sick, unnamed African girl, who was enslaved in the Gold Coast and brought to Newport, Rhode Island, queries a young life disrupted by the colonial project, language and property laws that define her young body as chattel and used in the settlement of a judicial case that center the economies of the slave trade and property ownership.

This examination concludes with the passing of the 1807 British legislation that abolished the slave trade from Africa to Britain's colonies in the Americas. Although the slave trade essentially ended, fortified by the policing of Britain's West African Squadron, a clandestine trade continued from the established colony of Sierra Leone. in the new republic of the United States, the abolishment of the slave trade from Africa in 1808 not only led to a clandestine slave

trade, but also a redefining of the parameters of slavery under the auspices of indentured servitude, in the North, and the opening of the domestic slave trade to the deep south. And despite the heightened hardships bonded girls faced in the British Atlantic during the nineteenth century, they continued to prevail on their own terms, until the abolishment of slavery in 1834.

Chapter One: Through the Body of a Captive Mooress

This endeavor begins with a profound loss. A loss that is discursively responsible for the river of tears countless African mothers have shed; their curses directed at the dark, turbulent sea because they believed their revered goddess has forsaken them; for their beloved daughters had been carried beyond the horizon to the realm of the dead. A loss of a younger sister, igniting despair because she has become a casualty, her young body becoming fodder for insatiable traders and marketed for her future physical, sexual and reproductive abilities. A loss, nonetheless, that spurred devout battle hungry men across the Maghreb and into Hispania. This loss ignited an era of religious and cultural transformation that would affect subsequent European trade in Africa and the colonization of the Americas, and the enslavement of countless sub-Saharan Africans would be realized through the body of a Black woman. This loss is made more profound because the archive of Africa, transatlantic slavery and colonization is enshrined in racial and gender biases that promote contempt, a lack of understanding and a distorted historiography; the result being a Eurocentric narrative that rendered Africans as chattel property, without kin, marked for labor and void of any viable past.[59] The result of these dehumanizing prejudices reverberate today as the daughters of those forcibly transported African girls contend with the afterlives of slavery, lives strife with racial injustice and gender bias. And so, this chapter begins with a death - the lamentable death of the apotheosized Muhammad ibn Abdullah.

On June 8, 632 CE, the Prophet Muhammad, after his return from Medina, died in the home of his beloved wife A'isha. His father-in-law, Abu-Bakr, known for his military prowess, became the new Caliph, the "successor of the apostle of God," and thus, the Rashidan Caliphate,

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[59] Amadou-Mahtar M'bow, "Preface," in *General History of Africa, volume IV, Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*, Niane, D.T. ed, (Heinemann, California: UNESCO, 1984), xviii. It should be noted, since the mid-1960s the reclamation of African history, inclusive of oral traditions, regional documentation, unpublished manuscripts in various languages including Arabic and Ajami (African languages written in Arabic script), and the work of African scholars from around the continent has profoundly changed the field of African studies and continues to grow as scholars expound upon the African past utilizing nuanced methodologies.

the first of the four major caliphates established after the death of Muhammad, was born.[60] For the next fifty years, the steel blade of the Arabian saif cut a westward path of ferocious wars and religious conversion across the Arabian peninsula, Southern Asia and North Africa - the Maghreb, - arriving in Mauretania, a region stretching from modern day Algeria to Morocco, in 680 CE. Between 705 and 709, the nomadic people of the Kingdom of Mauretania, the Mauri, fought the formidable Musa Ibn Nusayr, the Umayyad governor of Ifrikiya who is said to have "conquered, pacified and converted" the warring Berbers.[61] The Mauri joined the rapacious Umayyad Caliphate in 711 as they crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, and defeated the Visigoths in the Battle of Guadalete in present day Southern Spain. But the Umayyad expansionist victories would come to an end in 732, for Abdul Rahman al-Ghafiqi and his Islamic army was no match for Charles Martel and his Frankish militia as they forced the Umayyads to retreat into Hispania during the Battle of Tours.[62]

The Iberian Peninsula under Muslim rule was known as al-Andulus with the ancient Roman city of Cordoba designated as the administrative center for the Umayyad Caliphate. Wealth, education, and culture flourished. Toledo, Granada and Seville also became commercial and cultural centers, until the Umayyad Caliphate was overthrown by the Almoravid Caliphate in the eleventh century. But conquering battles alone did not facilitate the spread and influence of Islam and the culture of the Moors.[63] Expansionist endeavors were also promoted through trade, with Muslim caravans traveling time-worn Berber commercial routes along and below the vast

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60 J.J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, (London: Routledge / Taylor and Francis, 1965, 2002), 34.

61 The Umayyad Caliphate was founded in 661 in Damascus, Syria under Muawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan. Under his leadership, Central Asia (modern day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan southwest Kazakhstan), Sindh (Pakistan), Maghreb (northwest Africa) and the Iberian Peninsula came under Muslim rule. Ibid.

62 James T. Palmer, "The Making of a World Historical Moment: The Battle of Tours (723 / 3) in the Nineteenth Century," *Postmedieval*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2019. 206-218.

63 "Moor" would become a catchall term to describe North Africans and Arabs who practice Islam. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Moor." Encyclopedia Britannica, February 5, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moor-people.

Sahara into the Sudan - the land of the Blacks; where bustling markets were established, thus affecting local populations. Hence, through merchant activities and proselytization, Islam spread among sub-Saharan Africans. Moreover, these merchant activities would expand to include the trade in captive Africans. In his major work, *Kitab al-masalik wa-'l-mamalik - The Book of Routes and Realms*, written in 1068, Abu Ubayd al-Aziz al-Bakri of Cordoba described the town of Yarasna, a town "inhabited by Muslims surrounded by pagans."[64] The Muslims he described were black traders of gold and who spoke a Mandinkan dialect. They called themselves the "Banu Wangharata," the Wangara - gold merchants from the Kingdom of Mali.[65] By 1076 the Kingdom of Ghana was known as a Muslim state praised for its adherence to Islam, military skill and practice of slaving. The possession of one's labor that is equivalent to bondage has existed in Africa for millennia. But the archival record of the practice of slavery in the Kingdom of Ghana, as well as other early African states, is scant. It is not until the twelfth century that we see evidence of early African slave trading, when Abi Bakr al-Zuhri describes a raid in the "land of the Barbara and Amima," who "capture their people as they used to when they were pagans."[66] In the thirteenth century, Ibn Sa'id would also describe the forced captivity of non-Muslims in Ghana, but through the context of jihads.[67] Hence, the Kingdom of Ghana, as well as the Kingdom of Takrur in the Senegal Valley, were very particular about who could be enslaved. Writing in the twelfth century, Moroccan geographer Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad al-sharif al-Idrisi notes "the people of Barisa, Sila and Ghana make forays into the land of the *Lamlam* and

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64 Michael A. Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) 44. al-Bakri, despite being known as a geographer, never travelled to West Africa, but being from Spain, he had access to a great variety of sources, specifically to those who travelled to the Sahara and the Sudan - the land of the Blacks. See also: N. Levtzion and J.F.P. Hopkins, eds., *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, Third Printing, 2011) 62-87. Known hereafter as *Corpus.*

65 Michael A. Gomez, *African Dominion*, 44. The Portuguese encountered the Wangara in the fifteenth century when they began their own explorations on the continent.

66 Ibid. *Corpus*, 93-100. The Barbara possibly refers to the Bambara while the Amima were "impoverished Jews who read the Torah " and were involved in the importation of goods.

67 Ibid.

capture its inhabitants."[68] Ibn Khaldun concurs, stating that the *Lamlam* are made captives by the people of Ghana and Takrur, and sold to merchants who carry them beyond the Maghreb.[69] *Lamlam* is an umbrella term referring to non-Muslim people inhabiting an area south of the Kingdom of Ghana and along the Atlantic coast.[70] The Ancient kingdom's foray into slaving is indicative of their waning control over the gold trade, which ceased by the fourteenth century as the Kingdom of Mali rose to power.[71]

Language, Gender, and the Arab / African Slave Trade

The notion of (Arabic / Islamic) slavery and its prescription on African women is not simplistic and is often based on imagined prescriptions of gender, the body and overall complexion.[72] Therefore, it is necessary to clarify language misconceptions that are often repeated by western scholars who inquiry the Islamic slave trade and the bondage of African peoples. Muslim traders and writers employed various terms when referring to individuals held in bondage and sold throughout North Africa, the Mediterranean and the East. The term *ab'd*' (plural: *abid*) refers to one who is subordinated as a slave or servant and is often used to define those enslaved from East Africa, not the whole of the African continent as some scholars have suggested.[73] Those enslaved and designated as *abid* traveled down the Nile, into Egypt, across the

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68 Michael Gomez, *African Dominion*, 44

69 Ibid.

70 Other versions found in texts are Dahdam, Damdam, Iamiam, Namnam and Temiam. In 957 al-Masudi described the Dahdam living upstream from the city Gao noting, "They fight amongst themselves, are cannibals and have a king home other kings serve. But most importantly, in their land stands an important fortress (possibly a shrine) where there is an image in the shape of a woman. See: R. Mauny, "Lamlam," in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. First published online: 2012

71 Ibid.

72 Throughout this monograph I use the term "woman" and "women" loosely to denote females from the ages of ten on up, for once a girl menstruated, she was described as a woman by enslavers, capable of having children and thus commodified because of it.

73 See: Cristina de la Puente, "The Ethnic Origins of Female Slaves in al-Andalus," in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain, eds. (Oxford University Press, 2017), 124-142. James Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist

Red Sea and Indian Ocean and into Arabia, the Persian Gulf and Southern Asia. They were valued for their physical labor, like the Zanj who toiled tirelessly in the salt marshes of Iraq during the ninth century.[74] Their West African counterparts were known as *khadum* / *khadim* and were specifically from the Sudan - the "land of the Blacks." Those designated as *khadim* entered the Islamic world through ancient routes that led from the Sahara and into Morocco, Tunisia and Libya. Writing in the tenth century, geographer Muhammad al-Farisi al-Karkhi al-Istakhri claimed he had no interest in the Sudan. He stated the "orderly government of kingdoms is based upon religious beliefs, good manners, law and order, and the organization of settled life directed by sound policy," characteristics the people of the land of the Sudan in the west, as well as the Buja and the Zanj in the east, lacked.[75] He did note that *khadum*, Black slaves, come from the land of the Sudan. Ibn Hawqal clarifies al-Istakri's text, stating that comely slave girls known as *muwalladat,* a person of mixed Arabic and non-Arabic ancestry from al-Andalus, are imported from the Maghreb to the East, and *khadum* are imported from the land of the Sudan. Slaves from the land of the Slavs - Central and Eastern Europe - come by way of al-Andalus. Hence, whites, mainly women, were also enslaved and defined by the term *saqaliba*. Although the terms are not gender specific, both black and white women could be referred to as *surriyya* or *jariya*,

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Thought," William and Mary Quarterly, Vol. 54, No.1, (1997), 143-166. Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam* (New York, I97I), 63-64; Leon Carl Brown, "Color in Northern Africa," in *Color and Race*, ed. John Hope Franklin (Boston, 1968), 193

74 Among East Africans and Arabs today, the term is viewed as derogatory, equivalent to the western term, ni**er, traditionally used to demean a Black person and forever equate them to an enslaved past.

75 *Corpus*, 40. It is possible that al-Ishakhri is referring to the Beja people who inhabited modern day Sudan, Egypt and Eritrea. Writing in the tenth century, geographer Abu Nasr Mutanhar al-Maqdisi noted: 1) "The Bishariyya are a black people whose country is extremely hot. Their water comes from the Nile. They are Christians and live under tents: the Beja are part of them." 2) "The Zanj are of black complexion, have a flat nose, curly hair. Little intelligence and initiative … Foodstuffs and clothing are imported by them, gold, slaves (raqiq) and coconut are the main exports of their country." In 869 rebellion was ignited among the Zanj and other enslaved Arabs rebelling against the Abbasid Caliphate in southern Iraq. Thousands of men, women and children were killed during the fourteen-year uprising. See: Nicholas C. McLeod, "Race, Rebellion, and Arab Muslim Slavery: The Zanj Rebellion in Iraq, 869 - 883 C.E." (2016). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Paper 2381*. https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/2381

concubines, explicitly enslaved for their sexual labor. According to al-Istakhri, white slaves, and slave girls from al-Andalus, were highly valued, and the price of a slave girl could garner 1,000 dinars or more depending upon her appearance.[76]

Although Black and white women were enslaved, they occupied different servile positions based on perceptions of beauty, desirability, fantasy, and complexion. Travelers in the Sudan noted that the women were good cooks, "... they excel at cooking delicious confections such as sugared nuts (*jawzinaqat*), honey donuts (*qata'if*), and various other kinds of sweetmeats and other delicacies." These skilled women could be sold for 100 mithqals or more.[77] In contrast, the slave girls that were considered beautiful had "white complexions, good figures, firm breasts, slim waists ..."[78] Abu Rustam al-Nafusi, a merchant traveling below the Sahara, recounted a scene in Awdaghust, northwest of Timbuktu, where he viewed a woman "reclining on her side and her child, passing under her waist from side to side without her having to draw away from him at all on account of the ampleness of the lower part of her body and the gracefulness of her waist."[79] This innocent scene, of a child playing with his mother, ignited in the merchant a salacious desire that was promulgated by the woman's enslaved position.. But, while white and mixed raced enslaved women were desirous for their beauty, stimulating sexual arousal in the most pious of men, and associated with leisure and comfort, Black enslaved women were equally desired and valued for their domestic labor. This does not mean that they were no less sexually desirable. Abu Has al Qu'ayni, a man of letters, fell in love with a Black enslaved woman.[80] Abidah al-Madaniyyah, was given as a gift to Habib Dahhun, an Andalusian scholar, during his visit to Jerusalem. Impressed by her intelligence, Dahhun manumitted her, then married her.[81] In the thirteenth century, an amir in Ghana offered Black women as concubines to North African

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76 Ibid., 41
77 Ibid., 68
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid
80 Cristina de la Puente, "The Ethnic Origins of Female Slaves in al-Andalus," 131
81 Ibid.

merchants as a form of hospitality, their visage forever enshrined in the prose of Abd al-Mu'min al-Sharishi who opined, "God has endowed the slave girls there with laudable characteristics, both physical and moral, more than can be desired: their bodies are smooth, their black skins are lustrous, their eyes are beautiful, their noses well shaped, their teeth white, and their smell fragrant"[82]

Despite the fragmentary nature of the archive on Islamic slavery, Arabic legal texts, specifically those of the Maliki tradition, the dominant Islamic legal tradition in al-Andalus and the Maghreb, offer the greatest amount of information about the ethnic identity of the enslaved and the forms of labor they were made to endure. For example, in the eleventh century, the jurist Ibn-Sahl discussed the case of an enslaved black woman who was returned to her seller seventy days after the legal waiting period, or the period for having sexual relations with her enslaver, had ended. During this time, she had not menstruated.[83] Therefore it can be assumed that she was sold under false pretenses. Moreover, she was sold at a high price. The market value of enslaved women notwithstanding, we do know the woman was black, a possible indicator of her African origins. What we do not know is her name, for enslaved women and girls were often renamed and given poetic monikers that were indicative of their enslaved condition.[84]

The practice of slavery in Al-Andalus introduced enslaved women from Europe, West Asia, and after the eleventh century, sub-Saharan Africa, as Islam penetrated below the Sahel into the Sudan, the land of the Blacks. Large cities like Lisbon, Seville, Valencia and Barcelona boasted a ten percent population of enslaved people between the late fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Along the Atlantic coast, some smaller towns may have had as much as twenty percent.[85] In Lisbon, enslaved women and girls - *abid, khadim* and *saqaliba* - were employed as

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82 *Corpus*, 153.

83 Cristina de la Puente, "The Ethnic Origins of Female Slaves in al-Andalus," 135

84 Ibid., 136

85 William D. Phillips Jr., *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 10-11

laundresses, water bearers, domestics and concubines.[86] Aurelia Martin-Casares maintains that enslaved women outnumbered enslaved men in early modern Iberia and suggests that scholars should reflect on the experiences of women - why women commanded higher prices, why value was placed on their reproductive capacities and how the vulnerability of captive women led to sexual exploitation within the domestic sphere.[87]

For seven hundred and eighty years under various Islamic leaders, Muslim intellectual production would inform the cultural traditions of Iberians, specifically those which centers religion, gender, ethnicity and slavery. I contend as Iberians began their own maritime explorations and encounters in Africa, they utilized the texts of Muslim scholars to navigate the continent and to initiate contact with various African kingdoms in their quest for gold, skins and ultimately, African captives. These ideas would go on the influence other Europeans, like the English, as they penetrated the global stage of commerce with Africa below the Sahara, transatlantic slavery and colonization in the Americas.

Through the Body of a Black Mooress

"O how fair a thing it would be," Antão Gonçalves exclaimed to his faithful men, "if we who have come to this land for a cargo of such petty merchandise, were to meet with the good luck to bring the first captives before the face of our Prince."[88] The young captain and his crew of nine men were in the country where "people traffic with camels" and traded along routes that lead

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86 John L. Vogt, "The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade, 1486-1521*," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 117, No.1 (Feb. 16, 1973), 1

87 William D. Phillips Jr., *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, 3-4, Aurelia Martin-Caseres, La Esclavitud en Granada del siglo XVI: Género, Raza, Religion, (Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2000), 47-49. Because of the variabilities of the definitions of childhood based on social factors, adolescent girls (ages ten to eighteen) should also be considered within this scope.

88 Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Carnegie Institution of Washington, Division of Historical Research, (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930), 18.

across the Sahara and to the Mediterranean.[89] In 1441 Gonçalves had been commissioned by Prince Henry the Navigator to trade along the African coast for skins and other commodities. During his expedition, he met up with fellow seaman, Nuno Tristão who had been dispatched by the Infante to explore beyond Cape Barbas. But Gonçalves had other plans. While surveying the area the party came upon a Moor, a trader, following a camel and holding two *assegais,* slender spears, in his hand. Behind him followed a bound Black Mooress. Without hesitation, one of Gonçalves' men attacked the African, wounding him and taking him captive. From a safe distance, a group of traders watched as events unfolded. The Portuguese party ignored them, turning back towards their waiting vessels, but not before securing and taking the Mooress captive.[90] The merchants upon the hill retreated and left the captive woman and man to their unknown fates in the hands of the Iberian seamen.[91]

The next day, armed with information gleaned from the captive trader by one of Tristão's Moorish interpreters, Gonçalves' men attacked a nearby fishing village. Hungry for the imagined profit in securing African captives, the men shouted the praises of "Portugal" and "Santiago" as they felled African men, one after the other. When the dust settled, the Portuguese claimed ten men, women and children as their prisoners, including a man named Adahu who "was said to be a noble; and he shewed his countenance right well that he held the pre-eminence of nobility over the others."[92] It is evident that the Iberians mapped difference onto Africans based on their understanding of the Arabic language, Muslim religion and trade that was influenced by centuries of Muslim occupation. Because Adahu spoke Arabic, the Portuguese assumed he was superior to the other African captives who did not speak the language. Hence, the Portuguese drew hierarchical distinctions – between those Moors who could be sovereign subjects and the blacks

89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid, 21.

from the "*Terra de Guinea*" - Land of the Blacks, like the African woman, who they could objectively enslave because of their non-Christian status and black skin.[93] Satisfied with their human bounty, the Iberians returned to Lagos and presented them to a delighted Prince Henry.

Scholars of the Portuguese empire and the early slave trade from Africa have weaved a multitude of discourses that center trade, the quest for gold, and the enslavement of Africans through a Eurocentric, Christian lens. These ventures are often explained within the context of chivalric conquest against Muslim occupied territories, the interception of antiquated sub-Saharan trade routes, and the search for the mythical Prestor John who was thought to reside in India, then later Ethiopia. Although the House of Aviz's royal chronicler, Gomes Eanes de Zurara, painted such conquests in commercial colors, social conditions at the end of the fourteenth century in the Iberian Peninsula unveil a more complex portrait. But these events take a dynamic turn when viewed through the lens of fecundity and the body of an enslaved African woman.

Fecundity first raises its copious head in 1415, when King João I, and his sons, Dom Pedro, Dom Duarte, and Dom Henrique, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and claimed the Muslim occupied Moroccan port city of Ceuta. Ceuta was the gateway to the trans-Saharan route to the Sudan and the gold trade from the Kingdoms of Goa, Ghana, and Mali. The city also offered the Iberians dominance over the fertile North African coast with its profitable fishing industry, and the agricultural bounty produced in the fertile North Moroccan coastal basin.[94] Hence, Ceuta, with its agronomy, animal industries and trade networks stretching into sub-Saharan Africa was

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93 Herman Bennett, "Sons of Adam," Text, Context, and the Early Modern African Subject." *Representations,* Vol. 92, no. 1 (2005), 24.

94 Ibid., 407. With control of several Moroccan territories, the Portuguese actively engaged in the profitable fishing industry, exporting tuna and sardines from the Moroccan Atlantic to ports in the Mediterranean until the 1450s. Revenues from the fishing industry financed the monarchy's cod-fishing ventures in Iceland, as well as expeditions along the West African coast. The establishment of a trading post in Arguin in Mauritania, allowed for a regular trading route between Africa and Lagos and contributing to the burgeoning economy of the Algarve.

crucial for the small Iberian kingdom's long-term survival. But the conquest of Ceuta presented another rewarding opportunity for the Portuguese crown and their Christian allies; one predicated on the knowledge that their actions were within the chivalric laws of war and backed by papal decrees, an opportunity to fill the kingdom's coffers while providing a lucrative prospect for Christian merchants. Before the battle, King João I, along with the Bailiff of Valencia, arranged for the sale of Muslim captives in Aragon.[95] Florentine and Genoese vessels outfitted for the specific purpose of transporting human cargo waited patiently in Ceuta's port as the conquest and subsequent battles ensued. The transportation of captive men, women and children is believed to be "the first mass deportation of humans in modern times."[96]

Advances in maritime technology, and the financial backing of Prince Henry, propelled Portuguese and Genoese seamen down Africa's west coast. Caravels rounded Cape Bojador, located at the mouth of the Senegal River, and entered Guinea.[97] Understanding the advantageous profits to be made in the trade of African bodies, Lançarote da Ilha, an *almoxarife*, collector of royal taxes, in the customs house in Lagos, along with five other financiers, formed the *Companhia de Lagos* for the sole purpose of engaging in the African slave trade. The company was granted a license to trade south of Cape Bojador and in the Spring of 1444, the men set out for the Bay of Arguin where explorer Nuno Tristão had previously ventured.[98] Once they reached

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95 Ibid., 405.

96 Ibid.

97 The first to accomplish this feat was Gil Eannes, a squire brought up in the House of Aviz. In 1434 the Infante implored Eannes to "make the voyage from which by the grace of God, you cannot fail to derive honor or profit." Before him, explorers reached the treacherous cape known as Abu Khator, "the father of danger" and "the green sea of darkness" by Arab seamen. Eannes accomplished what was previously thought impossible, he rounded the cape and on the other side found a calm sea with a stretch of desert coastline. When he returned, he recounted to the Prince, "there is no race of men nor place of inhabitants in this place." In a vessel built using new technology that would allow captains to navigate closer to the coast, Eannes returned the following year. This time, he and his crew were able to track the footprints made by humans and camels, possibly a caravan engaged in trade in the region. See: Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*. Herman L. Bennett, "Sons of Adam": Text, Context and the Early Modern African Subject," *Representations*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (Fall 2005), 27.

98 Tristão had completed three voyages down the African coast before being killed during his fourth

their intended destination, they waited, and in the pre-dawn hours, bellowing tribute to "Saint James, Saint George [and] Portugal," the men ravaged the somnolent fishing villages inhabiting the islands dotting the bay.

> [Mothers forsaked] their children and husbands their wives, each striving to escape as best he could, some drowned themselves in the water; others thought to escape by hiding in their huts; others stowed their children among the seaweed, where [the Portuguese] found them afterwards ...[99]

Their venture was considered a success. On August 8, 1444, some 235 captive African men, women and children disembarked outside the city gates of Lagos.

> [They] were a marvelous sight, for amongst them were some white enough, fair to look upon and well proportioned; others were less white like mulattoes; others again were black like Ethiops and so ugly, both in features and body, as almost to appear (to those who saw them) [like] the images of a lower hemisphere.[100]

It is evident that biases existed towards those whose features and skin tone were reminiscent of their darker sub-Saharan lineages. For early modern Europeans, Ethiops / Ethiopians were synonymous with these ebony hues. The fruitfulness of the land below the Sahara, though sparse, provided a bounty of African bodies for the Portuguese to enslave. Moreover, they did not separate those they enslaved by geographic region, like the Muslim traders before them. The variance of hues of those enslaved was not as important as their being infidels. Therefore, Laçarote and his men were continuing a Christian tradition that had been in practiced since the Crusades. The individuals they imprisoned were not Christians and therefore considered enemies against the faith and the crown, and victory over their enemies was

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final expedition. In 1441 he sailed beyond the Rio de Bro in present day Western Sahara. During that voyage he met up with fellow seaman Antão Gonçalves. In 1443 he sailed to the Bay of Arguin where he and him men attacked a fishing village and enslaved fourteen of its inhabitants. The next year Tristão ventured further south reaching the Senegal River and encountering the mighty Wolof Kingdom. His fourth voyage would prove to be his last as Tristão and his men were surrounded by armed men from the Serer Kingdom and killed south of Cap Vert.

99 Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, 25

100 Ibid., 28

considered an award for their devotion; their payment, the bodies of (African) infidels to be sold for a hefty profit.

After their arrival, the captive men, women and children were separated on the beach outside of the city's walls. Eager buyers arrived to examine them, but not after the Infante received 1/5th of his share. "It was needful to part fathers from sons, husbands from wives, brothers from brothers. No respect was shown either to friends or relations, but each fell where his lot took him."[101] The scene was horrific. Mothers held on dearly to their children while "receiving blows with little pity for their own flesh."[102] Girls and young women were purchased by "some widows of good family" who later adopted them or left them an inheritance after their deaths, thus treating them like they were free. However, not all captives met with good fortune, becoming ill and dying shortly after their arrival. Of the two hundred plus captives, Prince Henry received forty-six, but, according to the royal chronicler, the Infante's chief riches lie in the accomplishment of his purpose, "the conversion of those souls before they were lost."[103]

The voyages and subsequent enslavement of Africans by Gonçalves in 1441 and Lançarote in 1445, mark a turning point in the Portuguese quest for the sustainability of the country and its people. Both men, and those they captained or partnered with, intentionally sought black, infidel bodies from Africa's fertile lands for trade. It should also be noted that early European travelers below the Sahara understood the value of working with specific African leaders and middlemen, for it was through their expertise that Europeans learned of the most viable markets for trade. With the intention of disrupting the trans-Saharan trade, the Portuguese established a *fietoria,* trading post, in the bay of Arguin in 1445. Six days' travel from the Atlantic coast lie the market of Wadan, "where the caravans arrive from Timbuktu, and from where "brass and silver from Barbary are sent back to Timbuktu along with horses." Arab traders traveled to

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101 Ibid

102 Ibid, 80-83

103 Ibid. For the Portuguese, converting Muslims to Christians was just as important as the labor enslaved individuals could provide.

"the land of the Blacks" and traded the horses for captives.[104] Ultimately the building of a *fietoria* in the Bay of Arguin would affect political and economic dynamics among the various groups living in the region and redirect overland trade from the Sahara to the maritime trade of the Atlantic coast.

Papal bulls supported by the Portuguese crown declared the lands south of Cape Bojador the sole dominion of the Portuguese. In 1456, Diogo Afonso, a squire in the household of Dom Fernão, Prince Henry's brother, and Genoese Antonio di Noli, came upon the Cape Verde islands and by 1462, the Portuguese began to settle there. Although cotton was first grown on the island of Santiago, the main purpose for the settlement was to establish a market for captives enslaved on the African coast.[105] *Lancandos*, Portuguese merchants, many of them Jews or new Christians looking to escape the Inquisition, settled in the islands, married African women and continued to engage in trade with African merchants on the continent. The mixed-race children of the *lancandos* would grow to become intermediaries between Africans and Europeans, dealing in the trade in African bodies.

Like the Muslim traders before them, Portuguese maritime explorers made crucial inroads with African traders on the upper Guinea coast who had a relationship with the powerful kingdom of Mali. A group of merchants known as the Wangara, gold specialists from the kingdom of Mali, had links with the great state of Gao (in the far east of present-day Mali), the Borghu gold fields (on the border of present-day Niger and Nigeria) and the Songhay empire.[106] In 1469 explorer Fernaõ Gomes was granted exclusive permission by Afonso V to trade in the

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104 Gomez, *African Dominion*,152.

105 In 1507, Valentim Fernades, in his manuscript *Relação de Diogo Gomes* about the life and maritime exploits of Diogo Gomes, wrote: "…a lot of cotton grows on this island, and cotton that is irrigated brings news twice a year, once in December and January, and once in May and June." The cloth produced from the cotton became a sort of currency known as *barafula*. Two 15x17 cm strips of *barafula* could be traded for one iron bar. See: Major Richard Henry, *The Life of Prince Henry of Portugal, Surnamed the Navigator, and its Results: Comprising the Discovery, within one century, of half the world – With the History of the Naming of America*, London: A. Asher, 1868.

106 Toby Green. *The Rise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 74.

Gulf of Guinea. Gomes hoped to insert himself into the Akan gold trade that was monopolized by the Wangarra. A strong demand for laborers also arose in the area due to the need for the forested region to be cleared for agricultural use. By 1479 the Portuguese were transporting African captives from the Benin coast to the Gold Coast in exchange for gold, salt, cloth, pepper and other goods.[107] Pleased with the success of the gold trade, John II of Portugal approved of a trading fort to be built in the region. The chosen location, Anomansa, the place of an inexhaustible supply of water according to local lore, was founded by Kwa Amankwa, the eldest son of the king of Aguafo, while on a hunting expedition. The Guan people who settled on the coast, had deep ties to the interior and to the kingdom of Asante. After many ceremonial negotiations with Kwa Amankwa, the Portuguese were granted rights to build a trading factory on leased land. Fort São Jorge da Mina de Ouro, built in 1482, stands on a narrow promontory bounded on two sides by the Atlantic Ocean and the Benya lagoon. The area was known as "the village of two parts" because the Benya River on the northeastern side of the castle formed the boundary between the states of Edina and Fetu. Between 1500 and 1535, ten to twelve thousand captive Africans were transported through Elmina's door of no return. However, these numbers do not account for the bodies transported by clandestine trade networks.[108] The Portuguese found success in the fertile grounds of West Africa, and thus needed to establish a formalized method for handling the business of trading African captives. The *Casa dos Escravos de Lisboa*, the Lisbon Slave House, was established in 1486. Its purpose was to receive all incoming captive Africans, expedite their assessment, taxation and the sale of captives to private parties or royal companies serving the

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107 As Portuguese explorers continued southward down the west African coast, they discovered the trade in gold began to wane and, in its place, African bodies became more valuable. The Portuguese began referring to the region as *Rios dos Escravos*, slave rivers. John L. Vogt, "The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade," 1486-15212, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 117, No. 1 (Feb.16, 1973). 1-16.

108 Ivor Wilkes. "Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. II The Struggle for Trade," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 23, No. 4, (1982), 465.

crown's various operations.[109] Not until 1580 would the prosperous monopoly of the Portuguese be arrantly contested by Castilians, the French, the Dutch and later, the English.[110]

The Nascent African Atlantic

Despite the force the Portuguese exhibited when exploring the African coast, it should not be overlooked that the Portuguese, while in the "land of the blacks," also worked with Africans, on their own terms and that trade with African merchants had to follow specific formalities. Before the arrival of Europeans, the Senegambia region, specifically the coastal areas between modern day Senegal and Sierra Leone, below the Sahel, was an area in flux dependent upon the Western Sudan and the Sahara for trade. Home to diverse groups of people — the Wolof, Peul, Tukulor, Manding, Sereer, Soninke, Susu, Joola, Nabu, Baga, Beafada, Bainuk, and Basari, — the region was both a "terminus for incoming populations and a point of departure for migrants on the move."[111] During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Islam traveled along the routes with merchants looking to trade below the Sahel and the empires of Mali and Songhai.[112] In the early fifteenth century, Portuguese explorers came into contact with merchants from the kingdom of Mali, looking specifically for gold and access to the profitable gold fields to the south.

The Senegal and Gambia Rivers with its many inland estuaries were the main entry points for Europeans into the region and thus made the area accessible to Atlantic trade. In the southern rivers region, the Portuguese were interested in produce, gold, and spices available south of Senegambia on the Malaguetta Coast.[113] They managed to infiltrate the inter-regional trade in

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109 John L. Vogt, "The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade, 1486-1521*,"* 1.

110 Kwesi J. Anquadah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana: Ghana Museums and Monuments Board*, (Paris, 1999), 52.

111 Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3-5.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid., 39.

kola nuts, pepper, salt, cotton cloth, iron and later captives. In exchange for captives, African merchants received horses from North Africa. Eight to fifteen captives were traded for one horse. Silver coins, iron, and manillas made of copper or bronze were also used as currency.

In 1448, after the Portuguese established trading on the coast of present-day Mauritania in the bay of Arguin, Bemoy, a prince and representative of the Jolof Kingdom arrived in Arguin and was happily received. He and his party were taken to Lisbon where he experienced "bull-fights, puppet shows and even feats of dogs." In return, his men showed off their equestrian agility. The men, afterwards, were instructed in the Christian religion and baptized. The Portuguese delegation returned to Senegal with Bemoy, but a quarrel broke out on the African prince's ship, and he was killed. Learning of his death, the Portuguese king gave up his plans for building a fort on the Senegal River.[114] But this did not stop the Portuguese from setting up strategic points along the river to control trade and redirect it towards the Atlantic coast.

Because of the change in commercial patterns, Africans began to insert themselves into trade relations with the Portuguese, resulting in a shift away from Saharan and Sudanese trade networks. Additionally, centuries old lineage based African states began to change to complex monarchical systems.[115] The Manding, also known as the Mandinka, are descended from the kingdom of Mali. Manding merchants, in the region between the Gambia River and Futa Jallon, turned to the trade in captive bodies as the Saharan trade began to dissipate. This decisive move in turn strengthened the economic position of the kingdom of Kaabu, a state rising to power after the decline of the formidable kingdom of Mali. Backed by its military prowess, the Farim of Kaabu, the commander of the state, became the region's most prolific slave raider.[116] In the

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114 Robert Huish, *Travels of Richard and John Lander, into the Interior of Africa for the Discovery of the Course and Termination of the Niger*, (London: John Saunders, 1836) 13-15.

115 It should be noted that the African response to Portuguese encounters and the shift in trade towards the Atlantic is not a singular phenomenon. As Europeans made their way down the west coast of the continent, fulfilling the demand for captive bodies for labor in colonies in the Americas, African polities would also adjust in accordance to their relationships with Europeans, at times interjecting themselves into European rivalries playing out on the African coast.

116 Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 43

Southern Rivers region in the Byayos Islands, slave raiding became a community effort. The women concentrated on agriculture, fishing, and home building while the men built canoes used specifically for hinterland slave raids. Still there were those, like the Joola, who chose to isolate themselves and hide within the mangroves, a natural refuge from slave raiders. The various populations of the Southern Rivers, the Bainuk, Joola, Papel, Balante, Nabu, Landuma and Baga, were the first victims of the Atlantic slave trade, some enslaved by their own countrymen.[117]

When Ruy-de-Sequra arrived in the kingdom of Benin in 1472, Oba Eware was too occupied with domestic affairs to receive him.[118] With financial backing from John II, Portuguese maritime explorer, João Afonso de Aveiro, attempted to reach the mighty kingdom, again, in 1485; traveling to the seaside city of Ughton then onward, by land, to the city of Ubinu. This time, Aveiro was welcomed by Oba Ozolula, who was looking forward to establishing trade relations with the Iberians. In an act of good faith, the Oba sent a trusted official, Ohen-Ojkun, "a man of good speech and wisdom," to Lisbon to engage in Portuguese culture and establish commercial networks. By 1505 the Portuguese established trading factories at Ughoton and the port city became a major center. Pepper, ivory coris beads, local cotton and captives were traded for copper, iron rods, silver cloth, European textiles and spirits.

The supply of captives was facilitated by the Edo, Ijo and Itsekeri. The Portuguese then transported these captives to Sao Tome to labor on sugar plantations, and northward to the Gold Coast to aid in the clearance of the forested region. Because of attacks from warring rivals, Oba Esigie, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, placed an embargo on the exportation of male captives from the kingdom. His mother, Iyoba Idia was his political counselor and was known for her military skill, spiritual powers and medicinal knowledge. Hence, in addition to consulting with the Oba for trade, the Portuguese had to contend with African women who were powerful heads of state. Because of a political decision initiated to save the kingdom, captive females

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117 Ibid.

118 Not to be confused with the Kingdom of Dahomey which came into prominence during the eighteenth century.

became the chief export of the kingdom, a state sanctioned decision that would last until the seventeenth century.

Because the Iyoba and her son refused to convert to Christianity, relations between the Portuguese and the Kingdom of Benin began to falter. King Manuel refused to supply the Kingdom of Benin with weapons to fight against opposing African states declaring: "For when we see you have embraced the teachings of Christianity like a good and faithful Christian, there will be nothing in our realms with which we shall not be glad to favour you, whether it be arms or cannons and all other weapons of war for use against your enemies." The high cost of captives and the refusal of Obas to accept Christianity caused trade at Ughton to dwindle and by 1507 it ceased. But the Portuguese were not completely done with the region, acquiring captives at Oere, a slave market supplied by Itsekiri merchants. The English would arrive in the Bight of Benin in 1553, parlaying trade agreements with local leaders that were not dependent on religious conversion.

In west central Africa towards the end of the fourteenth century, the Kingdom of Kongo emerged as a powerful state with a centralized government and smaller neighboring commonwealths paying tribute to the ruling family. The Kingdom was founded when Nima a Nzima of the Mpemba Kasi married Luqueni Luasanze, the daughter of the chief of the Mpbata people, thus unifying the two states of KiKongo speaking peoples.[119] Their child believed to have been born between 1367 and 1402, Lukeni lua Nimi, would become the first person to wear the united title of *Mutinú*, king. Conquests and territorial expansion grew the kingdom to about three million subjects by the time the Portuguese arrived in 1482.[120]

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119 John Thornton notes the history of the Kingdom of Kongo before the arrival of the Portuguese is difficult to ascertain due to the lack of written sources. However, the oral traditions of Africans should not be discounted, especially when many colonial sources are biased. See: John Thornton, "The Origins and Early History of the Kingdom of Kongo, c. 1350-1550" in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 34, No. 1 (2001), 90-105.

120 Ch. Didier Gondola. *The History of Congo*. (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 28.

Financed by King John II of Portugal, Diogo Cão set out to explore the southern west African coast. Below the equatorial line, he discovered an estuary of the Congo. Traveling the inland waterway, he encountered the states of Benin and Monomotapa. However, the rulers of these kingdoms were not interested in the Christian rhetoric espoused by the Catholic proselytizers. In the Kingdom of Kongo, however, the Portuguese explorer found an intrigued audience. When Cão returned to Lisbon, several Kongo elites accompanied him. They were educated in the Portuguese language, culture and Christian doctrine. In 1485 when they returned to the Kingdom of Kongo, they opened schools and became intermediaries for trade. In 1491, Nzinga a Nkuwu was baptized Joaõ I along with several elites of the kingdom. Those who were baptized adopted Portuguese names and titles such as 'king,' 'duke' or 'count.' John Thornton contends the Kingdom of Kongo converted to Christianity on its own accord. Hence, the kingdom controlled the structure of the church, and its doctrines were determined by Kongo as well as Europeans. In this early period of Christian inception, because Kongo controlled the church, attempts to use the church for political leverage by outsiders generally failed.

Nzinga Mbemba, the son of João I was christened Afonso I and was educated by Portuguese priests. After the death of his father, he and his brother Mpanzu a Kitima, who was also a traditionalist, vied for the throne. After defeating Mpanzu's forces, Alfonso sent his ambassador, and cousin, Pedro de Sousa, to Lisbon with letters addressed to the Portuguese monarch, Manuel I. The letters, now lost to the colonial archive, detailed events in the kingdom and his succession to the throne.

In the sixteenth century the Kingdom of Kongo adopted ecclesiastical legislation that prohibited Christians from enslaving Christians.[121] Afonso I, with the aid of Portuguese military

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[121] This is not the first time Portuguese monarchs were warned about the enslavement of African Christians. Galawdewos, the son of Emperor Dengel, inherited the throne after his father's death in 1541. In addition to leading the fight against Gragn, Galawdewos also had to attend to the slippery slope of enslavement the Portuguese took advantage of. His own brother, Minas, was captured and sold into slavery in Yemen. Fortunately, he, along with two other princes were found and ransomed for four hundred ounces of gold. Furious, Galawedewos protested to Joaõ III of Portugal about the

power expanded the Kingdom of Kongo by conquering neighboring states. War captives, mostly traditionalists from the hinterlands, were sold to Europeans and transported to the west central African coast or across the Atlantic to the Americas. However, Afonso soon realized his authority was being undermined by the Portuguese and that the lives of Kongo elites were jeopardized by the possibility of captivity. In 1526 Afonso wrote to King Joaõ III stating,

> And we cannot reckon how great the damage is, since the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives, because the thieves and men of bad conscience grab them wishing to have the things and wares of this kingdom which they are ambitious of; they grab them and get them to be sold; and so great, Sir, is the corruption and licentiousness that our country is being completely depopulated …[122]

In a second letter to the Portuguese monarch, Afonso denounced the practice of slavery, declaring that it was "another great inconvenience which is of little service to God." Afonso notes that the people of his kingdom desire the commodities the Portuguese have brought to trade from Europe, however, because of their greed, many "freed and exempt men," in addition to noblemen, the sons of noblemen and relatives, are sold to white men who have settled in the kingdom.

> And as soon as they are taken by the white men they are immediately ironed and branded with fire, and when they [are] carried to be embarked, if they are caught by our guards' men the whites allege that they have bought them, but they cannot say from whom so that is our duty to do justice and to restore to the freemen their freedom, but it cannot be done if your subjects feel offended, as they claim to be.[123]

To hamper the trade in captives, Afonso passed measures so that any European living and doing business in the kingdom had to inform several African officials of the court, who were responsible for investigating if any captives were in fact, free men. If European merchants did not comply, their goods could be confiscated. This mandate did little to curb the Portuguese and later,

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sharp increase of the slave trade due to European intervention. Here, in the history of Ethiopia, I posit, is where distinctions of racism and European superiority raises its head and trumps religion, as well as class, as a factor for enslavement.

122 Constance B. Hilliard, ed. Intellectual Traditions of Pre-Colonial Africa, (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 356-358.

123 Ibid.

the Luso-African monopoly on trade and colonial settlement. In 1575 Angola was established as a Portuguese colony with Luanda, it's capital, home to more than one hundred Portuguese families, military support, and a trading post for the exchange of European goods and captive Africans.

Anglo-Portuguese Relations

Inclusive of their geographic positions, England and Portugal stood at the edges of Christendom whose epicenter was France, the Church in Rome and the Holy Roman Empire.[124] Because of the importance of these centers, medievalists have focused on each kingdom's relationship with these centers rather than England's and Portugal's dependent relationship with each other. To only focus on the English entry into the Transatlantic slave trade during the sixteenth century ignores the commercial activities and associations the kingdom established with Portugal that began in the medieval period. An examination of Anglo-Portuguese relations brings to the fore England's position in the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds and its concomitant connections with other kingdoms that was dependent upon trade.

Basking in the memories of the first crusade, Pope Eugenius III issued the papal bull, *Quantum predecessores*, on December 1, 1145.[125] The decree was modified on March 1,1146 and called for the knights of Christendom to take up their swords against Muslims who occupied the holy city of Jerusalem. The next spring, in the north, a fleet of some two hundred ships, consisting of English, Flemish, Frisian, Scottish and Norman soldiers, embarked from the port of Dartmouth, sailed along the coast of France and stopped at the city of Porto on the Portuguese coast.[126] The soldiers heard of reports that the king of Portugal, Afonso I, was planning a siege on

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124 María Bullón-Fernández, ed. *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12-15th Century: Cultural, Literary and Political Exchanges*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), 2.

125 Michael Doeberl, *Monumenta Germania Selecta*, Vol 4, p. 40, trans in Ernest F. Henderson, *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1910), pp. 333-336

126 Jennifer C. Geouge, "Anglo-Portuguese Trade During the Reign of João I of Portugal, 1385-1433, in *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th-15th Century: Cultural, Literary and Political Exchanges*, Maria Bullón-Fernandez, ed., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11-17. Edgar Prestage, "The Anglo-Portuguese Alliance," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 17,

Lisbon, which was controlled by Muslims and offered to assist. In return, the Iberian king granted the soldiers the spoils of war after its capture. Three months later, on the twenty-fourth of October, the city of Lisbon was back in Christian hands. Afterwards, soldiers who fought for the city's liberation settled there, marking the beginning of a fruitful relationship between the Portuguese and the English.

The comradery between the two kingdoms, facilitated by the Christian faith and commerce, flourished. In 1308, King Dinis of Portugal signed the first trade agreement between Portugal and England. King Edward wrote to the Iberian monarch commenting on "the treaty of love and union that has hitherto existed between your *mercatores*, merchants, and ours."[127] English, Genoese and Florentine merchants established themselves in Lisbon, trading in North African wheat, olive oil and gold. As the fourteenth century progressed, Castilian tensions with Portugal reinforced the smaller Iberian kingdom's need for a strong ally and England fit the bill. In 1373, England and Portugal further solidified their relationship with the signing of the Treaty of Tagilde. Endorsed by King Edward III of England and King Ferdinand and Queen Eleanor of Portugal in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, the accord recognized the interminable "friendships, unions, alliances and leagues of sincere affection" between the two kingdoms.[128] The accord was also fortified through the marriage of John I of Portugal to Phillippa Lancaster, the daughter of John of Gaunt, the first Duke of Lancaster and the third son of Edward III in 1387. Their union, solidified by the Treaty of Windsor, signed the previous year in May, further strengthened the diplomatic alliance between the two kingdoms. English Men and women who followed Phillipa to Portugal found a welcoming home in the Iberian kingdom and English merchants were granted the same privileges as their Genoese, Florentine, Venetian and Flemish counterparts.

(1934), 69

127 Aubrey Fitz Gerald Bell, *Portugal of the Portuguese*, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1915), 221

128 H.M. Stationery Office, *Great Britain. British and Foreign State Papers, 1812-1814, Vol. I - Part I.* (London: James Ridgeway and Sons, Piccadilly, 1841). 465. This treaty is still in effect today but monitored by the United Nations.

In the beginning of the fifteenth century, João I sought to maintain a favorable trade relationship with England since the latter provided Portugal with wool and grain, two staples the Iberian kingdom did not produce for itself. In return, Portugal provided England with oil, wax, figs, resins, honey, dates, salts, hides and wine.[129] The English stood by their Iberian allies providing military assistance against Castile when needed, and when explorers, backed by the Iberian crown, ventured into the fertile lands of Africa and brought the first enslaved Africans to Lagos in 1441. Although the two kingdoms were dependent upon each other for trade and military might, their relationship was not always amicable. When Portuguese officials working on behalf of the crown failed to honor King João's debt to English financiers for the aid they provided during tensions with Castile, the Englishmen decided to take matters into their own hands, seizing the merchandise from twelve Portuguese vessels on a return trip from Flanders. The event could be viewed as an act of war because it went against the provisions set forth in the Treaty of Windsor, however, João I was determined to keep trade relations between the two kingdoms cordial.[130] By 1461, an English consul was established in Lisbon, Naples and Marseille.[131] The commercial relationship between Portugal and England was too valuable to suspend, due in part for the demand for the valuable commodities each kingdom possessed. But relations would be tested, again, when Henry VIII pulled away from Rome and the Catholic Church. Because Pope Clement VII was slow to grant Henry VIII a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, the English monarch cut ties with Rome and the Catholic Church. The Act of Supremacy, signed in 1534, recognized Henry VIII and the "supreme head of the Church of England." This split presented a conflict of interest for the Portuguese who were devout in their faith and held fast to their chivalric duty. Nevertheless, four years before his religious declaration,

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129 Jennifer C. Geouge, "Anglo-Portuguese Trade During the Reign of João I of Portugal, 1385-1433, in *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th-15th Century: Cultural, Literary and Political Exchanges*, 122.

130 Ibid.

131 Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660*, Oxford University Press, 2008. 49-50.

Henry VIII began challenging Portugal's tenacious monopoly on African trade. The English monarch commissioned William Hawkins, in 1530, to voyage to Brazil and the Guinea coast to engage in trade directly with Indigenous chiefs and African merchants.[132] On a subsequent voyage, he left one of his men, Martin Cockeram, in exchange for the safety and return of an Indigenous leader who agreed to voyage back to England with the privateer.[133]

During the reign of Henry VIII's daughter Mary, John Lok would voyage to Guinea and return with five African men. Robert Gainsh, master of the ship *John Evangelist* described them as "taule and stronge men … [who] could well agree with owr meates and drynkes [although] the coulde and moyst ayer dooth sumwhat offende them."[134] Unlike the enslaved Africans who disembarked on the beach in Lagos in 1441, the Africans arriving in England with Lok were not captives and the English perceived the visitors as "useful, ancillary agents in their expanding world."[135] Nurturing relationships with Africans allowed the English to permeate the African Atlantic shaped and monopolized by the Portuguese.[136] London merchant William Towerson who traveled to Guinea after Lok reassured African leaders that the men "were in England well used, and were there kept till they could speak the language." Once the Africans mastered the English language, three of the five men returned to Guinea as mediators between the two parties and the lucrative trade in gold, pepper, and ivory. There is no doubt that the English learned much from their Iberian predecessors when trading with Africa, however, they also sought to separate

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132 Clements R. Markham, ed. "The Voyage of William Hawkins in 1530," in *The Hawkins' Voyages During the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I, Cambridge Library Collection – Hakluyt First Series.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

133 Ibid.,4. The Brazilian chief stayed in England for a year. It is noted that the change in climate and diet resulted in the death of the chief during the voyage back to Brazil. Nevertheless, Martin Cockeram was returned safely to his countrymen.

134 Robert Gainsh, "The Second Voyage to Guinea" in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*. (London: George Bishop and Ralph Newberie, 1589) 94-97

135 Michael Guasco, "Agents of Empire: Africans and the Origins of English Colonialism in the Americas," in *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500-1830,* Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 43.

136 Ibid.

themselves from the violence the Iberians were known for, especially against Indigenous people in the Americas where their colonies began to thrive. But in an ironic twist, the English recognized the violent tactics used by the Iberians as necessary as they entered into the African Atlantic trade and and the business of slavery in their own American colonies. Even more so, English merchants realized that the success of their commercial ventures in west Africa depended upon affable alliances with African merchants, leaders, and middlemen.

In 1558 Elizabeth I ascended the throne and continued to challenge the Portuguese monopoly in West Africa. Four years later, the privateer John Hawkins, backed by London financiers, outfitted three vessels, and left the bustling port of London for the West African coast. As fate would have it, he seized a Portuguese slaver off the coast of Sierra Leone and acquired three hundred Africans "partly by sworde and partly by other means."[137] He then turned sail toward the island of Hispaniola where he sold the captives and then filled his ships with the bounty of the island – "hides, ginger, sugars, and some quantities of pearles."[138] Once the hulls were full, he returned to England, reveling in his success. Two years later, Queen Elizabeth I would fund his second voyage with his cousin, Frances Drake. In a leased seven-hundred-ton ship called the *Jesus of Lübeck*, the privateers would transport four hundred enslaved Africans across the Atlantic and sell them to the Spanish off the coast of Venezuela, thus earning Hawkins exclusive rights to trade with their southern European adversaries. To cement his status in English society as a premier trader, Hawkins would later add the image of a shackled African to his coat of arms.

The powerful arm of Islam extended beyond the borders of the Arabian Peninsula and brought the West into its multifaceted fold of religion, commerce and culture. Slavery was deeply interwoven within Islamic social conventions, where Eastern European, Asian and African women were acquired for their domestic and sexual labors. These social conventions influenced

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137 James Walvin, *Black Ivory: Slavery and the British Empire*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 23.

138 Ibid.

Iberians and thus informed their subsequent explorations and encounters in sub-Saharan Africa and the enslavement of African peoples, the first captive being a black mooress.

The driving force of fecundity and Christianity would lead to southward maritime explorations and trade as the Portuguese negotiated with African kingdoms for gold, skins, ivory, and captives thus facilitating a monopoly on African Atlantic trade and the collapse of antiquated overland Saharan trade routes. In response, African polities adapted their commercial activities towards the Atlantic coast, and the burgeoning demand for African bodies. But negotiations with the Iberians proved precarious for some African elites who engaged in human commerce, for they too wound up in shackles, bound for Europe or the Americas. Other African kingdoms were locked out of the lucrative trade with the Portuguese altogether due to their unwillingness to convert to Christianity. Nevertheless, other European factions, like the Dutch and English, enticed by the profits to be made in the commerce of African captives, began to challenge the Portuguese monopoly on African Atlantic trade. The English, in particular, who engaged in trade relations with the Portuguese since the twelfth century, in the sixteenth century challenged the Portuguese, plundering their vessels on the West African coast, claiming their human cargo and selling the captives in New Spain. Through these violent and lucrative privatizing efforts, England commanded a superior position on the Atlantic World Stage. Their next act would involve encounters with Africans and the stigmatization of the African female all the while creating a fantastical image that could be commodified and enslaved for European consumption in Africa and the Americas.

Chapter Two: A Sable Child and Slavery in England

When two captive African girls boarded a vessel with strange white men barking orders in a language they did not comprehend, they could not fathom what the gods had in store for them beyond the enigmatical horizon. The Portuguese caravel laden with commodities, and bodies, that were acquired along the Guinea coast, was attacked on its way back to Portugal, its merchandise seized as retribution by the infamous Scottish privateer, Andrew Barton.[139] In early 1505, James Beaton, the treasurer in the court of James IV of Scotland, recorded the curious arrival of two "Moorish lasses" on December 11, 1504. Barton had taken the two captive girls from the Portuguese ship and presented them to James IV. The girls were taken in, educated, baptized and renamed; one Margaret More, after the Queen, the other, Elen More after the Queen's favored lady in waiting.[140] They would later become part of the Queen's exclusive entourage. Elen would emerge as the most popular of the two. Three years later at an annual tournament held in a field near Edinburgh Castle, it is believed she was enthroned as the "Black Queen of Beauty" … and the king was the "Wild Knight," and her champion. Beaton did not shy away from expressing his sentiments, thinking James IV's choice of an "absolute negress" unconventional.[141] For Beaton, Elen was not the "Queen of Beauty" and that she should be defended "at the sword's point" was

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139 The Barton brothers of Leith, Scotland had a score to settle with the Portuguese, specifically, Alfonso V. In 1476 their father John, on his way home from Sluis, a popular port in Flanders, was attacked by two Portuguese warring vessels. His ship, the Juliana, laden with goods, was captured and the crew was set adrift in a boat, destitute on the high seas. Some years later, John went to Lisbon to plead his case, however his pleas, as well as those of James III of Scotland, were ignored by Afonso V. Not to be outdone, the Scottish monarch issued letters of marque to the Barton family, authorizing John and his sons, Andrew, Robert, and John, to raid Portuguese vessels until they have seized enough goods to reconcile the elder Barton's losses. Imitiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677*, 27-28, 31.

140 Scotland, Thomas Dickson, James Balfour Paul, C. T. McInnes, and Athol L. Murray. A*ccounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland = Compota thesaurariorum Regum Scotorum*. Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House. 1877. xlviii.

141 Ibid.

incredulous.[142] Nevertheless, Barton continued to describe Elen's lavish attire; "a gown of damask flowered with gold, trimmed with green and yellow taffety; … sleeves and gloves of black "semis" leather and sleeves … covered with "pleasance," of which material she also had a kerchief about her arm."[143] Her attendants were also exquisitely dressed in "gowns of green Flemish taffety trimmed with yellow."[144]

To commemorate the festive event William Dunbar penned the popular poem, "Of a Blak Moir" noting:[145]

When she is clothed in rich attire,
She gleams as bright as a tar barrel.
When she was born the sun suffered an eclipse,
The night be glad to fight for her sake –
My lady with the huge lips.

Whoever for her sake with spear and shield
proves the mightiest in the field,
shall kiss and hold her in grips,
And from thenceforth her love shall wield –
My lady with the huge lips.

And whoever in field receives shame
And loses their knightly name,
Shall come behind and kiss her hips,
And never to other comfort claim,

My lady with the huge lips.

The poem is meant to be comedic, an ode to a chivalric show of might and skill. But Dunbar's prose also highlights the availability of the African female body, masked by valiant (and violent) displays of manhood. If one wins, and this is presumed to have been the king, he "shall kiss and

142 Ibid.
143 Ibid., xlix-lil
144 Ibid.
145 National Library of Scotland, Scottish Text Society Publications, Old Series, *Poems of William Dunbar, Volume 2*, 1893., 217. https://digital.nls.uk/107454827

hold her in grips, but if another challenger loses, he "shall come behind and kiss her hips." There is also the irony of beauty inspired the notion of the fantastical other. Dunbar notes their arrival from Africa on the "last schippis," the last ships and compares Elen More and her shipmate to the Barbary ape, (Quhou schou is tute mowitt lyk an aep), an animal that Europeans found repulsive. Their noses are described to be catlike, (And quhou hir schort catt nois up skippis), an uncomely feature by early modern European standards. And although her skin is as "bright as a tar barrel," it is her huge lips that Dunbar finds extraordinary, surely not to praise their allurement, but to highlight their profound unseemliness when compared to the beauty of white women.

Against a multifarious backdrop of myth, blackness and religious inferiority, the English constructed a stereotype of "barbarous and bestial blacks" which served to justify the enslavement of Africans.[146] The fantastical African female emerged from the written pages of travelers' accounts to the continent, devoured by prose that made her lascivious and monstrous, yet highly coveted from a young age. As stories about Africa and the Americas were produced in England, readers consumed them, internalizing each description to comprehend and establish their own position in a developing world that centered on commodities and slavery. Hence, the English established their own racialized thoughts of superiority alongside new encounters that deemed Africans and Native Americans as different, uncivilized, inferior, and subservient.

It should be noted, however, that gender dynamics within the African sphere also contributed to the way Europeans interpreted and interacted with African women and their daughters. Women and girls made available to European travelers should be understood through the framework of bondage, found in multiple forms on the African continent, and not applied to whole African communities as some European travelers, and historians, have done. As the trade in African bodies proved to be profitable for some African groups along the west coast of the

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146 P.E. Hair, "Attitudes to Africans in English Primary Sources on Guinea up to 1650," *History in Africa*, Vol. 26, 1999, 43.

continent, some traditions specifically lent itself to the domestic and overseas trading of African females.

English women would also contribute to these new emerging hierarchical notions, using the African girls and boys they were gifted, staged portraits and cosmetics, to display their wealth, beauty and sovereignty. During the eighteenth century, the dominance of British women would be expressed and enacted upon the body of enslaved African girls as British women traveled between the British West Indies, England, Ireland and Scotland, thus debunking the common contemporary belief that enslaved individuals did not exist in England during the eighteenth century.

The Fantastical African Female and Atlantic Slavery

African women and girls would present a curious conundrum for travelers to the African continent and readers back in Europe. On one hand, she was carnal and savage, a manifestation of the monstrous multi-limbed female being that haunted the pages of Pliny the Elder's Historia Naturalis. If not monstrous, she was evil – like Grendel's mother in the epic story of Beowulf … after all, she was believed to be a descendent of the biblical Cain. On the other hand, the African woman was a bewitching figure, "… her stature large and excellently shap'd, well favoured'd, full eyes and admirably grac'd."[147] Whether repulsed or smitten, early modern travelers set the African woman against a feminine standard of beauty that was European. Although descriptions of naked African women evoked desire in some male travelers, European men portrayed African women as "unwomanly and marked by a reproductive value that was both dependent on their sex and evidence of a lack of femininity."[148] Hence African women and girls were prohibited from inhabiting a proper white gendered space while also possessing a complexion that marked them inferior, and thus made into a slave and marketable. With the commodification of the African

147 Richard Ligon, *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, London, 1657, 12.

148 Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 14.

female body in mind, European men looked upon the African female attentive to several factors' contingent upon her physical attributes, perceived labor and her sexual disposition with African and European men.

After two previous failed attempts, Guinea Company factor Richard Jobson set out to explore the Gambia River in 1620. During his travels he encountered the Fulbe who were subservient to the Maundingo (Mandinka). Surveying the Fulbe women, Jobson noted them to be "tawny" and "handsome" as well as "streight, upright and excellently well bodied." He found their features pleasing and admired their "longe blacke hair" which was "more loose than the blacke women have." Jobson draws distinctions between the two ethnic groups based on the complexion of their skin. The "tawny" Fulbe were more agreeable in character than the "perfectly blacke" Mandinka, who because of their blackness and their practice of polygyny was, according to Jobson, the descendants "from the race of Canaan, the son of Ham." The agreeable appearance of Fulbe women is not the only character he admires. Fulbe women are the primary traders with the Europeans exchanging "milke, soure milk, curds and two sorts of butter which is as good as any back in Ireland." In exchange they received beads, small knives, and salt.[149] They also spoke a different language from the "Blacke-men," the Mandinka.

Although Jobson detests the black hued skin of the Mandinka, he does not mention the physical attributes of the women. Instead, he focuses upon their sexual relationship with Mandinka men who are "furnisht with such members" that once a woman conceives, she no longer has a relationship with the father. Jobson continues, drawing on the biblical story of Oholah and Oholibah, the two Egyptian sisters found in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, chapter twenty-three, to characterize Mandinka women. The biblical women, who were prostitutes from a young age, "dote upon those people, whose members were as the members of Asses, and whose issue was like the issue of horses, there in right and amply explaining these

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149 Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade, or A Discovery of the River Gambra*, London, 1623. 45.

people."[150] For Jobson, Mandinka women were not only black, they were also promiscuous and sexually deviant in their relationships with Mandinka men, a trait that Europeans traced back to Noah's son Ham.

But it was not just black African women who drew the curiosity and ire of European men. Mixed-race women, the product of unions between African women and European men, were not seen in a favorable light. Dutch factor Willem Bosman admitted his prejudice against them claiming they possessed the worst character traits of both Europeans and Africans, were loyal only to themselves, and accused them of being "public whores to the Europeans and private ones to the negroes."[151] When they are young, he exclaimed, they "are far from handsome, and when old, are only fit to fright children to their beds."[152] He continues, "in [the] process of time their bodies become speckled with white, brown and yellow spots, like the tygers, which they resemble in their barbarous nature." William Smith would borrow from Bosman when commenting on the women he encountered in the Gold Coast.[153] Perhaps Bosman was responding to the self-determining nature of many mixed-race women who were independent merchants and acted as intermediaries between Europeans and Africans. On the other hand, perhaps he found intimate relationships between African women and European men unfathomable and therefore, unacceptable, thus projecting his hatred onto the female offspring of these unions. William Snelgrave, traveling in Guinea two decades after Bosman, also encountered a mixed-race woman. He was not revulsed by her like Bosman, however, he was puzzled by her appearance for she was "so white [she was equal] to our English women." Her hair was "wooly like the blackest of the natives," and her features were like her hair, like those of black

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150 Ibid., 47-48.

151 Ibid., 48.

152 William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea,* London, 1704, 141.

153 William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea*, London, 1745. 213.

Africans.[154] Although Snelgrave was intrigued by this woman's appearance, he concluded that she was not as beautiful as an "English rose."[155]

In the sixteenth century, Nuremberg artist and theorist Albrecht Dürer utilized mathematical calculations to study the proportions of the body. In his first method, Dürer theorized that the distance between two points on the human body were mathematically proportional to the person's height. His second method divided the height of a person into six equal parts. This number was then used for other bodily measurements. Of course, these numbers differed from one person to the next. Dürer's Four Books on Human Proportion was published after his death in 1528. It was the first work to apply the science of human anatomical proportions to aesthetics and contained over one hundred anthropometric woodcuts.[156] Sea captains, merchants, travelers and elites read extensively and regularly. Soon they began to apply Dürer's theories to the African body, noticing that men were more symmetrically proportionate than women. When Richard Ligon commented on the bodies of captive Africans in Barbados, he wrote that the bodies of the men were "very well timbered, that is broad between the shoulders, full breasted, well filleted and clean leg'd." On the other hand, the women were irregular and did not have the coveted measurements — "twice the length of the face to the breadth of the shoulders and twice the length of her own head to the breadth of her hips."[157] By marking the captive female body as "irregular," she became monstrous in the English imaginary, regardless of the backbreaking fieldwork she performed, her difficult pregnancies or the constant breastfeeding of her children. During his explorations along the Gambia River in the 1720s, Francis Moore found the African women he encountered asymmetrically made with "one breast generally larger than the other." Ship surgeon, and later abolitionist, John Atkins, disliked the women of "Negro-

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154 William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Guinea and Some Parts of the Slave Trade*, London, 1734. 51.

155 Ibid.

156 Pierpont Morgan Library Department of Printed Books, Albrecht Dürer, *Four Books on Human* (Hierinn sind begriffen vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion), Nuremberg: Agnes Dürer, 1532, 1534

157 Richard Ligon, *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* 1657.

land" because of their distended breasts writing, "childing and their breasts always pendulous stretches them to so unseemly a length and bigness that some … could suckle over their shoulder."[158] Popular Irish author Oliver Goldsmith, writing in 1774, would repeat Moore's observation of long-breasted black women adding that "their minds are incapable of strong exertions" due to the sweltering climate, and therefore, they are "stupid, indolent and mischievous."[159] Goldsmith never traveled to the African continent and it is not known if he ever encountered an African woman in England, but his crude writing would suggest otherwise, and is a possible reflection of English social views of Africans in England intersecting with the popular gendered prejudices of the time.

The preoccupation with the breasts of the African woman not only painted her as grotesque and deformed, it also suggested the potential of her reproductive capacities, bearing children to increase the profits of those who held her in bondage. Drawing on the classical scholarship of Aristotle, that Egyptian women gave birth easily and were inclined to give birth to monsters, English travelers projected this assumption onto the African women they observed during their travels. Charles Wheeler, an English trader who resided in Guinea for ten years in the employ of the Royal African Company during the early eighteenth century remarked on the joy African women feel in childbirth, noting that their "labours" were "so easy, so kind, so natural and so good, that they have no need for midwives, doctors, nurses, &c, and I have known women go to bed overnight, bring forth a child and be abroad the next day by noon." Wheeler attributed the ease of childbirth to the African woman's "natural" disposition. During his stay in the region, Wheeler lived with an African woman who shared that the reason for easy childbirth among African women was their adherence to religious and cultural taboos. Furthermore, he surmised that European women's garments caused additional hardships, the "stays, and multiplicity of

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158 John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West Indies,* London: Caesar Ward and Richard Chandler, 1735. See also Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women* and Stephanie Camp, "Early European Views of African Bodies" in *Sexuality and Slavery,* Daina Ramey Berry, Leslie Harris, eds. University of GA Press, 2018.

159 Oliver Goldsmith, *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature*. Vol. II, Dublin, 1774. 227-229.

garments … [as well as] the multitude of other distempers and damnable inconveniences … [which they] through pride and luxury, had brought upon themselves," and contributed to their difficult labors. The looser garments worn by African women did not confine their bodies. Adding to Wheeler's account, Smith surmised, not only was childbirth easier for African women, but their newborns were also beautifully formed. Because no special "provisions of any necessaries" were made for newborns, "all its limbs [were able to] grow vigorous and proportionate.[160] Smith, again, would borrow from Bosman's 1705 publication, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, because he believed that the coddling of English infants resulted in "so many crooked people."

Interestingly, travelers admired the strong infants' African mothers birthed, but tended to view older children with the same jaundiced eye as their parents. While working for the Dutch West India Company in the Gold Coast, Bosman observed that African women suckled their children until the age of two or three. Afterwards, "they turn out brutes," and if they are hungry, they are either given a dry piece of bread or have to fend for themselves. "These children," Bosman writes, "… are as well contented with dry bread as ours with all manner of delicacies, they neither think nor know any delicacies; nor are their mothers troubled with them." Not only are African women grotesque and sexual, they are also incapable of nourishing and nurturing their children beyond infancy. But not caring for their children is just one vice Bosman attributes to African mothers. He also notes Africans are "… besotted to strong liquors and tobacco," and their children are taught it at the age of three or four." Older children, like their parents, are sexualized, adding; "… children of eight or nine years know very early how the world is propagated, and before twelve, they generally reduce their knowledge into practice."[161]

Portraying African girls as sexual not only established a lineal legacy of sexual deviancy for European readers, but it also made her young body available, marketable, and painfully

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160 Wheeler in William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea: Describing the Customs, Manners, Soil, Climate* … London: Printed for John Nourse, 1745. 252, 263-264.

161 Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 110.

vulnerable to sexual violence from both European and African men. When he traveled up the Gambia River, Francis Moore stopped at the village of Nackway. Although some of the women ran upon seeing him and his entourage – for they had never seen a white man before – he found that some women, and their daughters, could be easily persuaded by enticing them with a piece of coral or a silk handkerchief. Afterwards, Moore surmised, "…the girls would have people think they are very modest … especially in the company of men, … but take them by themselves and they are very obliging."[162] Religion notwithstanding, Moore found women and girls who practiced the "Portuguese religion" and called themselves Christians could also be seduced into intimate relationships with European men as long as they are "able to maintain them."[163] To further stress the sexual availability of African women and girls, travelers tended to make pronounced assumptions. William Smith declared that rape did not exist in Guinea. "Young ladies," he writes, "are not taught by the priests, that the gratification of their darling passion is a damnable crime, as they are by the Christian Apostles in Europe." Christian young women in Europe are "taught to suppress these natural pleasures" and hence they are able to discourage the sexual advances of would-be suitors. By declaring the concept of rape does not exist in the region, Smith portrays adolescent girls as promiscuous and therefore sexually obliging and available for the pleasures of men because they have not been educated in Christian doctrine and taught to subdue their natural sexual urges. They are lascivious, profane, and uninhibited while their counterparts in Europe are painted as restrained and virtuous.

The African Community

Children are essential to African ways of being, John Mbiti explains. "A child not only continues the physical line of life … but becomes the intensely religious focus of keeping the parents in their state of personal immortality. The physical aspects of birth and the ceremonies

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162 Francis Moore, *Travels to the Inland Parts of Africa*, London, 1738, 121.

163 Ibid.

that might accompany pregnancy, birth, and childhood, are regarded with religious feeling and experience - that another religious being has been born into a profoundly religious community and religious world."[164] Children, moreover, are regarded with spiritual reverence because they are believed to be the reincarnation of ancestors or lineage spirits. It is up to the community to "protect the child, feed it, bring it up, educate it and in many other ways incorporate it into the wider community."[165]

When women in the matrilineal Asante become pregnant, every possible precaution is taken to ensure the health of the mother and her growing child, including limited contact with her husband. Her overall care is overseen by the women in her family. If a woman is unable to bear children, she is considered a disgrace and therefore an "implicit betrayal of her people."[166] Hence, Wheeler's suggestion of Mandinka women abhorring Mandinka men once they conceive is erroneous. Once a child was born, elaborate rituals were planned to celebrate the new life and welcome the little one into the community. While traveling in the interior, Moore observed the customary social practice of welcoming a newborn that involved dipping the infant "in cold water three or four times … and as soon as they are dry, they rub them over in palm oil."[167] Bosman also observed, "no sooner [than an infant is born] that a priest is sent for, who binds a parcel of ropes and coral … about the head, body, arms and legs of the infant." According to Bosman, the practice was believed to protect the infant from "sickness and ill will."[168] As for older children, explorers noticed that children remained naked until the age of eight or nine, by which time most African societies began nobility rites. For girls, these rites began at the onset of menstruation, between the ages of ten and thirteen and involved complex ceremonies and rituals. By the age of fourteen, most west African societies considered girls to be mature and ready for the lessons that would initiate them as full citizens in their respective societies.

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164 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 120.
165 Ibid., 110.
166 Peter Sarpong, *Girls Nubility Rites in Ashanti,* (Accra, Ghana Publishing Corp, 1977), 7.
167 Frances Moore, *Travels to the Inland Parts of Africa*, 93
168 William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 123

Before the arrival of Europeans, slavery, in various forms, existed throughout Africa. In the region of modern-day Ghana, a trans-Saharan system of enslavement existed for six hundred years before the Portuguese arrived in the fifteenth century.[169] Moreover, the word "slave" exists in the myriad languages spoken in the region and has various meanings. This attests to the antiquity of slave ownership as a concept. During the Atlantic slave trade era, three types of "slavery" coexisted: the Atlantic, the Saharan and the domestic.[170] When Europeans arrived in Guinea, they encountered a system of trade and human ownership that was adapted for specific political purposes. One gendered practice of enslavement involved the intimate relationships between European men and African women and these relationships were highly structured and deliberate. As European men arrived in West Africa, they took part in the sexual services made available to them as visitors: public prostitution, private prostitution and concubinage.[171] Although European travelers labeled these women as "whores," in actuality, they were enslaved women and older girls who were purchased for the explicit purpose of providing sexual services to European men and local bachelors. In short, these captive "public women" had no choice in the work they performed. An examination of these public women in the Gold Coast facilitates a richer understanding of the transformations of gender relations within changing African polities during the transatlantic era.[172] Utilizing reports written by Jesuit missionaries and Dutch explorers who visited the African coast, writer Olfert Dapper described the custom of public women, known as Abrakrees, in his 1686 publication, Description of Africa:

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169 Benjamin W. Kankpeyeng,"The Slave Trade in Northern Ghana: Landmarks, Legacies and Connections," *Slavery & Abolition,* Vol. 30, No. 2, 2009, 211.

170 According to Nwokeji, enslaved women dominated the Saharan trade while enslaved men dominated the Atlantic. Women and children were also in high demand in the domestic trade. See: G. Ugo Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," *William and Mary Quarterly,* Vol. 58, No. 1, *New Perspectives on the Transatlantic Slave Trade,* (Jan. 2001), 51.

171 Stephanie M.H. Camp, "Early European Views of African Bodies: Beauty" in *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas,* Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris, eds., (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2018), 22.

172 See: Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution Among the Akan of the Gold Coast, 1650-1950" Past and Present, No.156, August 1997, 146

> Although the Blacks along this coast and in the interior marry as many wives as they can maintain, it is customary in Atzijn [Axim] and all the surrounding areas, as far as the Quaqua Coast, for every village to maintain two or three whores, whom they call Abrakrees. They are initiated and confirmed for the conduct of this work by their Kabaseros or headmen in the presence of a large crowd of people, … they place these whores, who are certain purchased slaves, with many foolish and ridiculous ceremonies upon a straw mat and display them.[173]

Bosman adds, there are older women who "breed whole schools full of the handsomest [women and girls] they can find for their use."[174] Here the Dutch factor alludes to the gendered dynamics of slave ownership in the Gold Coast. Prominent African men and women could both own individuals and profit from the services their captives were made to perform. Once a female was purchased and assigned to be a "public woman," an elaborate communal ritual was performed to mark her position in the community. Afterwards, she is "brought to the publick market-place, accompanied by another woman already experienced in that trade, in order to instruct her on the intricacies of deportment for the future."[175] Everything she earns through her services must be given to the person she is bonded to. Afterwards, a hut is built for her, close enough to her owner's but at a far enough distance for the privacy needed to perform her services. For the rest of her life, she is obliged to serve any man who seeks her.

In the Gold Coast, public women were sometimes used to alleviate domestic and political tensions and became pawns in trading relations with Europeans. Bosman recounts a method used to subdue tensions with locals. Factors would take one of the public women into custody and imprison her within the fort. As the news of her imprisonment spread, "[the men] go with flying

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173 Olfert Dapper never traveled to Africa. Instead, his work on Africa is based on the accounts of Jesuit missionaries and Dutch travelers. See: Olfert Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique, contenant les noms, la situation et les confins de toutes ses parties, leurs rivières, leurs villes et leurs habitations, leurs plantes et leurs animaux, les moers, les coûtumes, la langue, les richesses, la religion et le gouvernement de ses peuples: avec des cartes ...*, Chez Wolfgang, 1686.

174 William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 214.

175 Ibid., 230.

sails to the caboceers, and earnestly desire them to give the factor satisfaction, [so] that they may have their whores set at liberty again." The release of the Abrakree assuaged the sexual tensions of young unmarried men and the danger of lying with another man's wife. Her release was also a political feat in favor of Europeans and their hold on trade as they negotiated and resolved conflicts between themselves and locals.[176]

Another institution of perpetual servitude for girls that continues to be currently practiced in parts of Ghana, Togo and Benin is known as trokosi: a system associated with religious and spiritual principles that exist outside of the temporal world. Priests devoted to the shrine of the deity act as mediators between the deity and the community. They are also responsible for guiding devotees in the service to the god.[177] As a judicial process, trokosi allows an individual who commits a crime, that is objectionable to the god and larger community, to seek retribution in the form of a young, virgin girl. Girls committed to the shrine are called trokosi, which loosely translated means "slaves to the gods," "brides of the gods" or "servants of the gods" and remain enslaved to the shrine, and the priest, for their lifetime.[178] Those worshipping the deity believe the young girl is serving the god but, she is beholden to the priest, even bearing his children. If a girl runs away or dies, her family is responsible for replacing the girl with another from their family. If the priest succumbs, she becomes the property of his successor. During the eighteenth century, the practice adapted to the demand for bodies in the Americas. Priests utilized the shrine for their benefit, trafficking young girls into the slave trade and profiting all the while. Sadly, the cycle of enslavement of young girls, and the enigma surrounding the shrine, continues today.

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176 Ibid., 213.

177 Sandra E. Greene, "Modern Trokosi and the 1807 Abolition in Ghana: Connecting Past to Present," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4, 2009. 60.

178 Berniece Jacqueline Scott. "Economics and Trokosi Slavery in Ghana," *Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 24, (2014). 5.

Race, Blackness, and the Reading Body

"Race" and "racism" are terms employed cautiously throughout this dissertation. Although these terminologies are often used in scholarly discourses about the early modern period to illustrate ethnic discrimination, the various European terms utilized during this period suggest kinship and therefore, are not equivalent to their contemporary usage.[179] Blackness, however, is a term used to describe, not only the hue of one's skin, but also their sullied character. Blackness is mutable, dependent upon the individual and the complex social conditions affecting their daily lives. Thoughts of blackness can be traced back to the classical era, where humoral theory is especially prevalent in early classical writings. Hippocrates of Kos (Hippocrates II) believed geography and climate were significant factors in the physical appearance and temperament of people, writing: "the forms and dispositions of mankind correspond with the nature of the country."[180] Aristotle praised the superiority of the Greek race, a result of inhabiting "a middle position geographically, for it is both spirited and intelligent."[181] It is interesting to note that "Ethiopia," named for the land south of Egypt by the Greeks, means "burnt" or "scorched by the sun." It is understandable then, why Pliny the Elder, writing in the first century, would declare, "there can be no doubt, that the Ethiopians are scorched by their vicinity to the sun's heat, and they are born, like persons who have been burned, with the beard and hair frizzled[182] …" Jean Devisse explains, in addition to these humoral traits, Ethiopia and Ethiopians, symbolized the "unknown, hedonistic and demonic aspects of life" for early Christians.[183] Hence, Ethiopians were described as "black" because of their environment and their questionable character.

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179 Joaneath Spicer, "European Perceptions of Blackness as Reflected in the Visual Arts," in *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Joaneath Spicer, (Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum, 2013), 36.

180 http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/airwatpl.24.24.html

181 http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.7.seven.html

182 Joaneath Spicer, "European Perceptions of Blackness as Reflected in the Visual Arts," 36.

183 Ibid.

In the eighth century, the Almoravids reached the Iberian Peninsula, bringing with them their distinctions of blackness and slavery. Through language, Muslim traders created an institution based on bondage that subsumed legal definitions and the intensive labor the enslaved produced. Free blacks within al-Andalus were also defined by labels used to define the enslaved. Although they were no longer held in bondage, the stigma of blackness was deleterious, and the opportunities afforded to them were limited. Through antiquated trade routes into sub-Sahara Africa, Muslims were frequent travelers below the Sahel. One of the first Muslim travelers to record his travels through the Kingdom of Ghana was Ibn Haukel. Writing in the tenth century he noted, "I have not described the country of the African blacks and the other peoples of the torrid zone: because naturally loving wisdom, ingenuity, religion, justice and regular government, how could I notice such people as these, or magnify them by inserting an account of their countries." For Ibn Haukel, African nations below the Sahel were uncivilized and therefore not worth discussing intellectually. In the eleventh century, Sd'id al-Andalusi expounded upon science and learning among nations, but did not look favorably upon Africans noting,

"For those peoples . . . who live near and beyond the equinoctial line to the limit of the inhabited world in the south, the long presence of the sun at the zenith makes the air hot and the atmosphere thin." Because of this their temperaments become hot and their humors fiery, their color black and their hair woolly. Thus, they lack self-control and steadiness of mind and are overcome by fickleness, foolishness, and ignorance. Such are the blacks, who live at the extremity of the land of Ethiopia, the Nubians, the Zanj and the like.[184]

During Ibn Battuta's travels to Africa during the fourteenth century, he did not look favorably upon the kingdom of Mali, noting the nakedness of the women and their adherence to traditional customs. Like Muslim travelers before him, Ibn Battuta found the black African inferior and thus, himself superior because of his civility. But it was Ibn Khaldun in the fifteenth

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[184] Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*, 36. James Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," 146.

century who linked the inferiority of Africans to slavery citing, "the Negro nations are, as a rule, submissive to slavery, because (Negroes) have little that is (essentially) human and possess attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals."[185] Not only did Ibn Khaldun relate the inferiority of Africans to animals, he blamed their inferiority on the tropical environment in which they lived.

James Sweet argues that the generative notion of the lighter hued Muslim elites' desire to protect their position of superiority, through the trope of civility, weaved a common thread that rejected blackness. Moreover, the Muslim world expected Africans to be slaves. But slavery in al-Andalus was more complex and multidimensional than constructed hierarchies based on skin color. Characterizing slavery through this singular trope only partially explains the institution of slavery in the Arab world which trickled over into European understandings of blackness and slavery. In short, even in their enslaved condition, not all enslaved peoples in Iberia were equal; a palace slave was not equal to the common enslaved laborer, and there were a number of judicial mechanisms in place that allowed for the enslaved to be emancipated. These mechanisms would continue in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas and become a marked difference when compared to the English in their own colonies. Also, the aforementioned Muslim intellectuals, while degrading the African, did not relate his blackness to the biblical curses of Cain and Ham. This is because these curses do not appear in the Quran, possibly due to the prohibition of the consumption of alcohol in the Islamic faith.[186]

Versions of the curse of Ham can be found in the Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish ceremonial law and lore. In the third century, a rabbi recorded the account of Noah writing, "God prohibited Noah and all the creatures in the ark from engaging in sex during the flood. Three creatures transgressed — the dog, the raven, and Ham, son of Noah — and were

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185 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, 1967), 117.

186 The Quran, Surah 11:25–49.

punished. Ham's punishment was that he became black…"[187] The curse of Ham would be reiterated in Christian discourses, with the descendants of Ham being cursed with blackness and enslavement because of his indiscretion.

Like those of the Jewish faith, Christians would also look to the biblical curses to define blackness and who could be enslaved. Before the fifteenth century, Europeans became familiar with descriptions of blackness through medieval representations of heaven and hell; where the devil and his minions - "torturers, executioners, demons, sinners and imps" — were cast as black hued, some even possessing wide flat noses and fleshy full lips, features associated with the African.[188] These images, combined with biblical passages and catechisms prepared by Christian clergymen, fueled the attentive imaginations of the reading elite and the mostly illiterate common populace. In the Song of Solomon, for example, a Biblical inamorata declares "I am black but comely… look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me."[189] Jeremiah 13:23 asks "can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" Both refer to the dark hue of the skin, one tainted by the scorching of the sun, the other by an immoral character. If we consider the scripture by itself, blackness can be interpreted as mutable - one could turn black from the sun or by an immoral deed.

Medieval Christian geographers marked the region below Cape Bojador in the western Sahara as the boundary between the habitable temperate zone of Europe and the inhabitable torrid zone below the Sahara. Hence, ancient notions of blackness combined with medieval imagery, interpretations of biblical scripture and geography impressed upon Europeans a notion of Africa and Africans as being "abnormal elements in creation."[190] By the fifteenth century, memoirs

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187 David M. Goldenberg, "The Curse of Ham: A Case of Rabbinic Racism?" in *Struggles of the Promised Land*, Jack Salzman and Cornel West, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27.

188 Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat. *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Volumes II, Part I (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc., 1979)

189 The Holy Bible, Song of Solomon I :5-6

190 Ibid.

written by European explorers who traveled below the Sahara would begin to dispel the myth of the torrid zone. Before his famed voyage to the Americas in 1492, Christopher Columbus and his men spent time trading on the West African coast. He writes, "I was in the castle of the king of Portugal at Mina, which is below the equinoctial line, and so I am a good witness that it is not inhabitable as some say."[191] Although Columbus and other explorers to the African coast continued to disprove the inhabitability of the torrid zone, the notion of blackness and the sweltering environment remained indelibly linked in the European mind.

Taking cues from their Portuguese allies, the English imagined Africans as less than human and at the same time, commodifiable, an available source of profit and labor for their colonies in the Americas. In contrast, English nationalism was elevated as a pure and civilizing factor that spread throughout the British empire facilitated by imagery, travelers' accounts, and popular literature.[192] Reading was something that early modern readers knew to happen in and to the body. Before the seventeenth century, reading was an embodied act: it was not prior or extrinsic to subject formation but instead was an important quotidian experience.[193] The embodied act of reading not only involved one's eyes and brain, it also involved the blood, vital spirits and humors, thus affecting one's temperament and health. Therefore, humoral theory: the assumption that humors existed in the body as liquids – blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile – and related to the four natural elements of air, wind, water and fire, which in turn reflected the seasons, was more than a medical comprehension of the body based on classical discourse. Empedocles' theory of the four elements and seasons, combined with the understanding of the humors of the body manifested humoral theory as a global discourse.[194] Because humoral theory was inherently geographical and climatic, it explained who you were as a person, your geographic

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191 Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589*. 181

192 Elizabeth Spiller. "Introduction: Print Culture, the Humoral Reader and the Racialized Body" in *Reading and the History of Race in the Renaissance*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 1-40.

193 Ibid.

194 Ibid.

identity, and the particular hue of your skin. When one read biblical, medieval, and early modern literature or interpreted imagery, they became, what I term a "reading body," physically and emotionally altered by what they had read, heard or seen. In turn, the experience of reading helped to shape the world around them.

Early modern biblical interpretations, popular literature and travel narratives swept readers away to exotic locales and fortuitous encounters with the peculiar "other." The act of writing is not that distinct from reading, and because authors voraciously read the works of others, we can also consider authors to be reading bodies. Toni Morrison reminds us that both tasks "requires being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer's imagination, for the world that imagination invokes."[195] She continues, "both require being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision."[196] In the early sixteenth century, prominent papal theologian Jannes Annius published his commentaries on several ancient texts. One, in particular, was a damaging interpretation of the curse of Ham suggesting the curse of blackness was placed on a white family as a mark of inherent immorality and hypersexuality, traits that became associated with the African. By the mid-sixteenth century, it was discovered that Annius had forged the manuscripts he based a few his comments on. However, the damage from multiple interpretations of the curse of Ham and the dichotomy of white and black, had already taken root.

In 1578, sea captain and influential member of Elizabeth I's privy council, George Best published his work that centered on Martin Frobisher's expeditions to North America. Within its pages, Best advances the curse of Ham by recounting the biblical flood and noting that Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their wives, were white. According to Best, Ham's disobeyance of God's command caused the punishment of blackness. He writes, "a sonne should be borne, whose name was Chus, who not only it selfe, but all his posteritie after him, should be

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195 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), xi

196 Ibid.

so blacke and loathsome, that it might remain a spectacle of disobedience to all the world. And of this blacke and cursed Chus came all these blacke Moors which are in Africa."[197] According to Best, Ham's indiscretion resulted in a black son whose blood was tainted since his inception. But his account leaves one with questions - why does he recount the story of the flood in his work detailing an expedition in North America? Moreover, why does Best suggest it was Cush that was cursed and not Canaan? One answer may lie in the Elizabethan justification for the exploration of North America and the West African coast. If we understand Best not only as an author but as a "reading body," perhaps influenced by the writings of Annuis like other Europeans of the time, the recounting of the biblical flood not only explains the blackness of Africans, but imagines them as recalcitrant, abhorrent, and unsanctified. Through the notion of the biblically cursed African, the Englishman became Christian, civilized, and pure.

Still, I contend, there is another underlying reason for Best's hypothesis of tainted black blood. While in England he had seen and "Ethiopian as blacke as cole" who had married a "faire English woman."[198] Their child was born "as blacke as the father was," although he was born in England. On the one hand, Best discredits the idea of humoral theory. The child's blackness was not a result of geography or climate. On the other hand, his theory of blackness as an infection is substantiated, "it seemeth his blackness proceedeth rather of some natural infection of that man, which was so strong that neither the nature of the clime, neither the good complexion of the mother occurring, could anything alter." Blackness is positioned as an infection of the blood against the good complexion of the mother, her whiteness. Best, as a reading body and a writer, was fully vested in England's maritime explorations and perhaps needed a way to explain England's growing population of African and mixed-race people. The perception of tainted blood and immorality would be used to describe the overall characters of mixed-race people in Africa, England, and England's American colonies.

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197 George Best, *A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie for the Finding of a Passage to Cathaya*. (London: Henry Bynnyman, 1578). 30-31.

198 Imitiaz Habib. *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677 Imprint of the Invisible.* 308.

Parallel to the biblical origins of blackness runs an often-overlooked relationship between labor and skin color. Those whose skins were darkened by the sun worked the land, traveled or spent a significant amount of time outdoors, like the "sunne-burnt pilgrim, the sun-tand slave or the tawnie gardener with sunne-burnt hands."[199] With the establishment of plantations and farms in the Caribbean and on the North American mainland, a myth emerges relating dark skin and other physical features to an "inherited destiny" of slave labor on one hand and ethnic difference on the other.[200] During the Northwest Passage in 1577, sailor Dionise Settle happened upon a dark-skinned Inuit and exclaimed his "colour is not much unlike the Sunne burnt countrey man, who laboureth daily in the Sunne for his living."[201] The sailor's words "domesticate the strange and evoke English hierarchies of rank and region."[202] Merchants and sea captains did the same when evaluating the African body. The darker the African, especially women, the more she was associated with agricultural labor, and this labor would be marketed alongside her reproductive worth. Understanding the varying motives and experiences of writers, whether they are explorers or literary authors, within the context of reading bodies, we can then understand the relationship and gradual transformation between blackness and labor become interconnected as the hierarchies of race begin to take shape in the early modern period.

Blackness was the primary indicator defining difference while race suggested a commonality based on social hierarchies. As reading bodies, medieval and early modern readers manifested what they read and thus blackness was mutable and used in multiple contexts. Iyengar maintains, "early modern discourses inherit and produce its own language about skin color." When the English encountered different peoples during their explorations and colonization campaigns, they were described in dark, tawny, black, inhuman, and unchristian tones. Perhaps a better understanding of difference during the early modern period, to borrow from literary theory,

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199 Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 11.

200 Ibid.

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid.

resides in Rosalie Colie's concept of "kind." Colie argues, early modern literature "classifies, multiplies, subdivides and recreates" the [multiple] genres of literature and claims that these various mixed genres identify as modes of thought. These "resources of kind," contain within itself the idea of sexual and reproductive production.[203] "Kind" is not only descriptive of generic forms, but also of human distinctions - "skin color, gender and social status." In her edict of 1596, Elizabeth I, for example, called for the trade of blacks in exchange for English prisoners held by the Spanish. She declared that "there are of late divers blackamoores brought into this realm, of which kinde of people there are already to manie."[204] Hence, Elizabeth I's usage of "kind" denotes an unwelcomed difference in the form of expendable Africans in her kingdom.

Objects of Empire

Although the year 1492 is hailed as a turning point for the history of the world, European exploration, wrapped in a framework of fecundity, pushes this date back to the early fifteenth century when the Portuguese rounded Cape Bojador - a region European Christian geographers marked as an entry point to the inhabitable torrid zone. As the Iberians entered the lush, tropical land of the Blacks, they set off a maritime frenzy that challenged popular Christian geographical scholarship that had been established by classical Greco-Roman discourses.[205] Columbus, before his famous voyage, would also challenge these former maritime beliefs when he arrived in the Gold Coast in 1482. The Italian maritime explorer spent a significant amount of time trading in Senegambia and the Gold Coast. In addition to noting the many languages spoken, he detailed the type of trade to be found there including the types of products "that are brought from Guinea, from the rivers of Sierra Leone."[206] Hence, the Portuguese entry into sub-Saharan Africa and the

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203 Ibid., 3.

204 Acts of the Privy Council, New Series, 46 Vols. London, 1890-1964, 26:16-17

205 Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A 'New World' View," in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1995), 9.

206 Toby Green, *The Rise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589*, 182

establishment of mercantile and trade networks, on the basis of the exchange of European goods for gold and slaves, were the "necessary and indispensable prelude" to the relationship between Christian Europe and non-European peoples in Africa and the Americas.[207]

Before Columbus set off to navigate a new route by sea to the East, he made sure to carry European goods to present as gifts to local leaders in the name of diplomacy and commerce. He made sure to employ Africans who in turn presented gifts to the Indigenous leaders they encountered; a practice they were accustomed to in their own homelands in the form of tribute to paramount chiefs, as well as gifts to visitors who came in contact with the state.[208] Here the idea of gift-giving deserves further examination in juxtaposition to European gendered power, empire and the enslavement of African girls. I contend that gift-giving in the early modern British Atlantic served three interrelated purposes, the first, establishing networks between the European monarchy and aristocracy thus exercising a social dynamic that resulted in elite privilege and class hierarchies. In her examination of gift giving in sixteenth century France, Natalie Davis surmises that "gift-exchange persists as an essential relational mode, a repertoire of behavior, a register with its own rules, language, etiquette and gestures."[209] Moreover, for early modern individuals, gifts were divinely given and humans were linked to each other through reciprocity.[210] The enslaved individuals Gonçalves and Laçarote presented to Prince Henry the Navigator after their slave raiding voyages below the Sahara, as well as the goods and enslaved Tainos Columbus and his men acquired in the new world and presented to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand II of Spain were turned into "gifts of tribute," church offerings and rewards in return for royal benevolence, reassurance and allegiance. When the English ventured to the African coast to interrupt the Portuguese monopoly on African Atlantic trade, they would follow

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207 Sylvia Wynter, "1492," 10-11.

208 Toby Green, *The Rise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589*, 182-183

209 Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000)

210 Ibid.

suit.[211] After his second voyage to West Africa and New Spain in 1564, John Hawkins returned to Cornwall and gifted Queen Elizabeth I, financiers and venturers with gold, silver, pearls, jewels and captives.[212] Three years later, backed by the Queen, London financiers and a crew of eager men, Hawkins would sail again for the coast of West Africa.[213]

The second purpose of gift-giving serves to establish commercial and diplomatic inroads with local African states thus facilitating a change in African polities and trade towards the Atlantic and resulting in European dominance in a specific region in West Africa. As discussed in the first chapter, as well as in subsequent chapters, Europeans had to adhere to the parameters of trade set by African leaders. Tributes to African kings and merchants were necessary to initiate trade relations between the two parties. But it is the third inquiry of gift giving that intersects themes of gender, power, beauty, and sovereignty. As English privateers like Lok, Hawkins and Drake returned to England from their adventures abroad in Africa and the Americas, they showcased the treasures they acquired — parrots, monkeys, gold, silver, spices, cloth, ivory, skins, and individuals. Lady Raleigh, the wife of Sir Walter Raleigh, was among the first of the English aristocracy to make it fashionable to own and exhibit African servants, captives acquired during her husband's exploits in the New World. Captive African children were objectified as objects of empire, a representation of the luxury goods to be had as a reward for England's violent foray into the African Atlantic trade.[214] African girls given as gifts retained the prestige

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211 Queen Elizabeth I was aggressively intent on disrupting the Portuguese monopoly on African and Barbary (Morocco) trade and supported the formation of The Barbary Company in 1585, as well as trade in Senegambia, supporting merchants from London and Exeter and granting them a patent to trade between the Senegal and Gambia Rivers for a period of ten years. See: Kim F. Hall, Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 21. Thomas Stuart Wilan, *Studies in Elizabethan Trade*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 139.

212 Richard Hakluyt and E. J. Payne. 1893. *Voyages of the Elizabethan Seamen to America; Select Narratives from the "Principal Navigations" of Hakluyt.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 9-60

213 Ibid.

214 Elvira Vilches, "Selling the indies: Columbus and the Economies of the Marvelous in *New World Gold: Cultural Anxiety and Monetary Disorder in Early Modern Spain*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 65.

and visibility of prized objects for they were considered luxury goods and therefore, did not suffer the laborious and often obscured condition as those specifically enslaved for their labor.[215]

As England deepened its hold on transatlantic trade and slaving during the seventeenth century, new cultural meanings were developed for consumer goods that incorporated images of the fantastical African. Hence, the Black image created a shift in visual culture and could be seen in everyday objects including jewelry, architectural elements, and print material. Chandra Mukenji surmises, a "level of social strain and conceptual discomfort accompanied changes in the meaning of goods.[216] Enslaved Africans became "meta-objects," symbols for the amassment of lucrative imported commodities.[217] Furthermore, the objectification of Africans in English material culture was indicative of the rarity of the imported product and the individualized perceived valuation of the European enslaver.

European Women, African Girls, and Seventeenth Century Portraiture

In the seventeenth century, the British expressed a keen interest in the Portuguese monopoly in West Africa and the profits to be had by acquiring and transporting African captives to European colonies in the Americas.[218] To promote Britain's self-sufficiency, decreasing the nation's dependency on imported goods in a burgeoning global economy, Parliament issued the Navigation Act of 1651. The statute was conceived with the Dutch in mind in order to limit the

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215 Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 212. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 137-138.

216 Ibid. Also, Chandra Mukenji, *Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1983), 13.

217 Ibid.

218 The Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland were united in 1603 when James II, the King of Scotland, inherited the crowns of the three kingdoms and moved his court from Edinburgh to London. Unification was tenuous, resulting in conflict that ensued until 1707. The Acts of Union would unite the three kingdoms resulting in the Kingdom of Great Britain. I outline this history to clarify the notion of who was intricately involved in the British entry into a global economy, as well as the proliferation of popular ideas that reached beyond England to affect Irish and Scottish popular ideas during the early modern era.

number of foreign imports in the commonwealth and its colonial possessions, thus inhibiting free trade and resulting in the Dutch - Anglo War in 1652. Eight years later, Charles II took the throne and established the Royal African Company, partnering with other members of the Stewart family and London financiers, to strengthen England's commercial advantage in West Africa. In 1660. The Navigation Act was amended, continuing the policies set forth in the legislation of 1650 and expanded to include commodities grown in England's West Indian and North American colonies - sugar, tobacco, cotton, wool, indigo, and ginger, - were only to be imported to England.[219] By 1677, the English crown recognized captive Africans as commodities, as stated by law, and grouped with the other commodities outlined in previous measures. Hence, merchants could transport enslaved Africans to England's colonial holdings, as well as profit from selling captives in Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and French colonial ports, especially after tensions exploded between Portugal and Spain in 1640.[220]

The demand for African labor in England remained small and a luxury market built on domestic servitude flourished in the kingdom.[221] African girls, gifted to the mistresses and wives of the aristocracy, figured into a complex paradigm between extravagance and labor, fantastical gendered objects of empire juxtaposed against the beauty and sovereignty of the European

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219 These acts incited tension among planters in North Carolina, resulting in clandestine trade in goods to flourish. This led to England imposing the Plantation Duty Act of 1673 which led to Culpepper's Rebellion. Colonists John Culpepper and George Durant incited an uprising, claiming that the legislation denied them access to a free market outside of England and placed heavy taxes on commodities.

220 At first, English privateers supplied Spain's American colonies with captive Africans. Later, the Asiento de Negros was a trade agreement between the Spanish crown and multiple European merchants to supply the captive Africans to Spanish American colonies. This contract was economically advantageous for Spain since it did not invest in the resources to directly engage in the trade of African bodies. After the Portuguese Restoration (1640-1668) Spain relied on other European factions to fulfill their need for African labor. The British, through the South Sea Company, would not be awarded the Spanish Asiento until 1713 due to competition from the Genoese, Dutch, and French.

221 Catherine Molineaux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 22.

woman.[222] African servants became fashionable in the royal court. Even more so, African girls and their male counterparts became a form of social currency, "consumed and displayed in a semiotic system of status."[223] This commodified difference distinguishes enslaved labor from indenture servitude during the era of the Transatlantic slave trade.[224] Taking cues from their European neighbors, British women utilized the desired visual medium of portraiture to display their wealth, beauty, sovereignty, and power during the latter part of the seventeenth century. During the fifteenth century, Isabella Gonzanga, the Marchionesse of Mantua, was known for her fascination with young African children. In 1491, she enlisted the services of Venetian merchant, Girorgio Brognolo, to procure a young black girl between the ages of one and four.[225] In a follow up request, she instructed Brognolo to make sure the child was "as black as possible."[226] It can be concluded that Gonzanga made such a request because the child's ebony hue would greatly contrast with her own fair complexion in the portraits she commissioned. Joneath Spicer notes the marchioness' obsession with black child servants, coining her behavior as "maximum exoticism," an extreme mania that depended upon the possession and complete subjugation of the black female body.[227]

Portraiture thus became the desired visual medium to display English wealth and dominance during the latter part of the seventeenth century. Catherine Molineaux warns scholars against viewing such portraits within a singular context that draws on contemporary discourses that objectifies the condition of the enslaved.[228] I contend that some theories, like that of "social

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222 African and East Indian boys also figured into this paradigm, more so than their female counterparts, and were subjected to wearing a visual adumbration of their bondage - a silver collar.

223 Catherine Molineaux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony*, 31.

224 Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Ear*ly *Modern England*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 212-213.

225 Paul H D. Kaplan, "Isabella d'Este and Black African Women," in *Black Africans in renaissance Europe*, T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, eds, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125-154.

226 Ibid.

227 "European Perceptions of Blackness as Reflected in the Visual Arts," in J. Spicer, ed., *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe* (Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum, 2012), 43.

228 Ibid., 31-32

death" promoted by Orlando Patterson, offer scholars a critical methodology that delves into the social history of the enslaved that departs from dominant Eurocentric discourses which often silences the bonded experience. Nevertheless, engaging in contemporary scholarship without critical inquiry and comprehension overlooks the staged composition of the artwork that was carefully constructed to communicate a discernible and collective acceptance that does not convey the actual experience of the enslaved child.

The seventeenth century portraits of aristocratic women included both male and female African child servants as accompanying subjects. Some of these children appear androgynous and therefore, elements within the painting must be carefully examined to discern the artist's (and mistress's) message, rendered carefully on the canvas by each skillfully placed stroke. One of the most famous of these portraits, painted by Pierre Mignard in 1682, is of Louise Renée de Kéroualle, the Duchess of Portsmouth, and Charles II's favorite mistress during the 1670s[229]. In the composition, she is draped in a gown of amber silk jacquard adorned with jewels and delicate white lace. The royal blue silk oversleeves envelope white silk bishop sleeves that are also finished with jewels and white lace. Her dark curly hair frames her delicate features, her face the color of the most delicate porcelain accentuated by the rosy blush of her cheeks and lips. She leans slightly forward, drawing the viewer into her world with her percipient gaze while her right arm casually rests around the shoulders of an adoring sable child. The young servant is dressed in the same manner as her mistress; a green silk taffeta gown accentuated with white sleeves and similar lace. Her brown skin and short, dark cropped hair are a stark contrast to the woman she is standing beside.

But there is something else visually at play aside from Mignard's skill with color, light, and shadows. In this portrait, and in those of similar composition, the African child is always offering gifts to her mistress. In this composition, the young girl, from her right hand, offers the

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229 Through his seven mistresses, Charles II fathered thirteen illegitimate children. Louise de Kérouaille is the ancestress of three women in the current royal family - Diana, Princess of Wales, Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall and Sarah, Duchess of York.

Duchess a nautilus shell filled with pearls. These items are a metaphor for the riches to be had by England's engagement in foreign maritime trade. The enslaved girl, who represents Africa itself, is offering the Duchess, who represents England, the riches to be gained when participating in the African Atlantic trade. From her left hand, she offers Kérouaille a piece of red coral, a substance found in cosmetics and therefore representative of European women's beauty.[230] Red coral is also associated with fertility - in this case the fruitfulness of Africa's resources being offered to England.[231] Around the servants small neck is a pearl choker, a reflection of the pearls worn by the Duchess, and also a possible reflection of her enslaved status; similar to the silver collars young enslaved male servants were forced to wear.[232]

230 Catherine Molineaux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony*, 36

231 One might also conclude that the red coral is indicative of the fecundity of the African girl, representative of her labor; beneficial resources being offered to England, and thereby increasing the Kingdom's and independent financiers' coffers.

232 Catherine Molineaux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony*, 36

Image 1: Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth with an unknown female attendant painted by Pierre Mignard, 1682. National Portrait Gallery, London. #497

Despite these sumptuous offerings, the Duchess does not acknowledge them, reflecting the indifferent nature of the British African trade in commodities and bodies. This stands

in stark contrast to the intimacy of gift exchange between English lovers, spouses, friends, and acquaintances. Her nonchalance defies her actions for she draws the child into her sumptuous space and adorns her in the latest English fashion; a process of acculturation that affirms the social position of enslaved Africans in English aristocratic society against rapidly evolving sentiments of English imperialism.[233]

What a portraitist's skill did not reveal on the canvas, British women's usage of cosmetics disclosed on their bodies through adornment, adding to popular social constructions of gender, visibility and blackness.[234] As with portraiture, women during the seventeenth century understood the usage of cosmetics to visually differentiate themselves from each other, and from the new black and brown complexioned individuals travelers encountered in Africa and the Americas, and wrote imaginatively and extensively about. African females were viewed as markers of race and therefore, the British woman sought to define herself as a racial subject. Cosmetics were used to highlight these differences; smooth alabaster and blush tones versus deep chocolate and ebony hues, thus making whiteness the standard of beauty, sovereignty, and a visible, acceptable English trait.[235]

By the turn of the eighteenth-century portraits displaying the wealth of the elite and showcasing the doting black servant became passé. So too did the wearing of cosmetics to denote the social hierarchy and sovereign difference between English and African women. But the message had already been engraved in the minds of English women. There was a marked difference between them and their African counterparts, the

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233 Ibid.

234 Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 62

235 Ibid.

subservient, fantastical sable Venus. This racial and gendered power dynamic would continue to play out across the Atlantic as the importation of Africans increased to England's colonies in the Caribbean and North America, and English women joined their husbands across the Atlantic and back to England with black servants in tow. This practice would test the laws of human bondage in England as more black servants resisted the shackles that slavery placed upon them, and black girls became more vulnerable to the whims of those who enslaved them.

They Were Enslaved in England

In a small church cemetery in Oxhill lies the final resting place of Myrtilla, an enslaved girl belonging to Mr. Thomas Beauchamp who was buried on January 6, 1705. Along with her enslaved status, it is inscribed on her headstone that Thomas Beauchamp was a "gentleman from Nevis," a testament to his business as a planter on the small Caribbean Island, for his familial roots were in the small English village. Beauchamp's wife, Perletta, was the daughter of the rector of Oxhill and Idlicote.[236]

Like many English men of means Beauchamp took advantage of the profits to be made by investing in and owning estates in the West Indies. Although Nevis had been claimed by the Spanish in the fifteenth century, James VI and I of Scotland and England would declare it for Britain. In 1628 colonization would commence when settlers from London and the nearby island of St. Kitts arrived.

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236 Warwickshire County Records Office; Warwickshire Anglican Registers # DR24.

By the end of the seventeenth century Nevis was the the center for the British slave trade in the Leeward Islands, as well as the main connection point for all vessels commissioned by the Royal African Company.[237]

It is not known what part of Africa Myrtilla was from or if she was born on Nevis, already enslaved by the Beauchamp family. According to estate records, Thomas Beauchamp owned the plantation, Saddle Hill, before 1720 and left a share of the property to his son, also named Thomas.[238] It is possible, however, that Myrtilla was brought to England to care for the younger Thomas, who was born in 1705 in Oxhill.[239] Sadly, like many Africans and their descendants who were brought to England and unused to the cold climate, Myrtilla succumbed to England's winter weather before performing any of the duties she was expected to engage in for Perletta Beauchamp and her newborn son. Whereas in the previous century African girls occupied a liminal space between luxury and servitude within the households of aristocratic British women, in the eighteenth century they became increasingly coveted for their domestic labor, caring for the children of the wealthy, many of whom they were not much older than. Some worked as the personal servants to the wives and daughters of wealthy men, even traveling between the metropole and the colonies while adeptly navigating their bonded existence.

Although plantation slavery did not exist in England, a system of bondage steeped in domestic servitude and service flourished from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The issue of slavery became a heated debate on the parliamentary floor where changing

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237 Vincent K. Hubbard, *Swords, Ships and Sugar: History of Nevis*, 5th edition, (Nevis: Premiere Editions, 2002), 86-102.

238 In her will proved on June 9, 1750, Perletta Beauchamp bequeathed three estates belonging to her late husband, Summary of Individual | Legacies of British Slavery, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146666743.

239 Thomas Beauchamp Jr. was baptized on March 8, 1705, at the small church in Oxhill. Warwickshire county Records Office; Warwickshire Anglican Registers # DR24.

attitudes about who could be enslaved caused division between the metropole and burgeoning colonies. Here an examination of English law warrants close attention to comprehend how the English dealt with the issue of slavery, in England, and juxtaposed against the legislation instituted in the American colonies to contend with the increasing population of enslaved Africans, for one affected the other, and the thousands of African souls transported to England and the Americas for their labor.

On May 14, 1625, Captain John Powell claimed the island of Barbados for England. Two years later his brother, Captain Henry Powell, arrived on the island with eighty English settlers and ten enslaved Africans, believed to be acquired from the pillaging of a Portuguese vessel.[240] The arrival of enslaved Africans in the British West Indies automatically assumed their subservient position in the new Anglo-American colonial space, therefore there was no need to formally codify their social position that was dependent upon their labor for the duration of their natural lives.[241]

As wealthy colonists were allotted acreage, the Bajan landscape acquiesced to growing cotton and tobacco estates cultivated by European indentured servants and enslaved African and Native American laborers.[242] With the population of the enslaved increasing, a series of laws were instituted to govern and differentiate their bonded position from European indentures. I argue, what would culminate into the Barbados

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240 Jerome Handler, "An Early Edict on Slavery in English America: The Barbados Resolution of 1636 and Island's Slave Laws," The Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, Vol. LXV, 2019, 24

241 Ibid.

242 In 1627, Captain Henry Powell transported thirty-two Indigenous people from Dutch Guiana to Barbados. In exchange for living as "free people" and facilitating trade between England's colonies, the Indigenous people agreed to instruct the English on the cultivation of cotton, tobacco and indigo. The agreement, however, was brief, for shortly after Powell's departure, the Natives were forcibly enslaved by the colonists. See: Linford Fisher, "Dangerous Designs: The 1676 Act to Prohibit New England Indian Slave Importation," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1, January 2014. 102-103.

Slave Code of 1661, also known as *The Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes*, was derived from a series of sixteenth century English legal precedents instituted to keep the social order by dealing with "masterless men," homeless and jobless men who wandered from place to place disrupting the English social stratum.[243] The first of these laws was introduced in 1547. The law suggested that vagabonds be taken up by any master and enslaved for two years as chattel property.[244] Although the law was repealed two year later, other elements of the precedent remained, like the requiring of individuals to carry a pass, the branding of offenders, the collective pursuit and capture of offenders (hue and cry), and compensation for the capture and detainment of offenders.[245] These pieces of legislation would later find its way into the precedents instituted in colonial spaces with growing enslaved populations. Scottish legal historian Alan Watson has theorized that the development of new legal systems was predicated upon the borrowing from previously established legal systems. Therefore, the laws instituted in England's American colonies were taken from established precedents in English jurisprudence, then adapted to fulfill the needs of the colonial space. Furthermore, large portions of legislation are transplanted when 1) people move into a new space where there is no comparable group and takes their system of laws with them, 2) when a people move into a different space where there is a comparable group and takes their law with them and 3) when a people voluntarily accepts a large part of the legal system of another group.[246] Therefore, when English settlers colonized new world spaces, they brought with

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243 The Act for the Better ordering and Governing of Negroes would be amended in 1688.

244 Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782,* (Houndsmill, Hampshire: Macmillan Educational LTD., 1990), 18-20, 59.

245 Ibid.

246 Alan Watson, *Legal Transplants, An Approach to Comparative Law,* second edition, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 22-30

them a legal system already in place in the metropole and adapted these laws to deal with their new world realities predicated upon their religious beliefs, racial hierarchies and the institution of slavery.[247]

The establishment of the Barbados Slave Code of 1661 caused Parliament to question the status of enslaved Africans in England. In 1674, a member of the House of Lords proposed a clause regulating "in what Manner, and upon what Terms, Slaves, either Blacks or any other Foreigners, not being Christians, may be used in England." Despite the acknowledgement of Africans and their descendants in England being enslaved, the proposed bill also recognized the enslavement of other individuals, besides Africans, as well as non-Christians. The bill, however, was not considered and died in Parliament. Nevertheless, two years earlier, Presbyterian minister Richard Baxter captivated the public by decrying the horrors of the African slave trade to Barbados. He maintained that under certain circumstances Christians could enslave other Christians and that the baptism of non-Christians led to their emancipation, a notion many came to believe when it came to the plight of those held in bondage.[248]

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247 For example, the Barbados Slave Code of 1661 was adapted for use in Virginia resulting in the Virginia Slave Code of 1662. Under English law, a child took on the status of the father, but Virginia legislators changed the law so that a child born of an enslaved woman took on the status of the mother, regardless of the father's race, thus, ensuring a perpetual supply of enslaved labor for the enslaver and dismissing the sexual violence often committed against the body and fractured psyche of the enslaved woman. It is also interesting to note that that the condition of *partus sequitur ventrem* did not exist in the Barbados Slave Code of 1661 nor its amendment in 1688, a fact that historian Jerome Handler points out as wrongly attributed in the scholarship of other historians, like Hilary Beckles and Linda and John Heywood.

248 Part of the Barbados Slave Code dealt with the conversion of Africans to Christianity and the punishment meted out for any African striking a Christian. What it did not state was that the conversion of any enslaved African led to emancipation. Therefore, planters in the colonies and men in the metropole were at odds. Ruth Paley, Christina Malcomson and Michael Hunter, "Parliament and Slavery, 1660-1710," *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 258.

The issue of baptism and slavery caused exasperation among investors in the American colonies, for the labor and the profits to be made by the cultivation of tobacco, indigo, sugar, and cotton, as well as other commodities, took precedent over the saving of the souls of the enslaved. Pamphlets published in 1702, 1711 and 1727 continued to endorse the idea that baptism did not affect the legal status of the enslaved. But legislators in England continued to insist that whether baptized or not, slavery could not exist in England because Parliament never clarified the status of the enslaved.[249] Those holding individuals in bondage had to refer to the Yorke-Talbot ruling of 1729 which declared that the status of the enslaved did not change upon entry in England and that baptism did not award manumission.[250] The contrariness of these debates is best demonstrated by an incident that occurred in November 1760 when a nine year old Black girl ran away from her mistress because of her "ill usage."[251] She was taken to Saint Margaret's Parish Church, by two housekeepers, to be baptized. However, once the mistress found out about the plan to baptize the young girl, she, "without regard for decency," disrupted the church service and "violently forced the girl out of the church and dragged her along the streets like a dog."[252] Without any regard for the girl's treatment, the woman yelled for all to hear that the girl was her slave and that she could "use her as she pleased." The reporter goes on to question whether a master or mistress has the power to prevent the baptism of a slave after their arrival in England. Moreover, is a Black person still considered a "slave" after baptism? Lastly, because of "ill-usage" does the law have the capacity to emancipate an enslaved individual from bondage? Four

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249 Ibid. 260

250 Ibid.

251 "News." Gazeteer and London Daily Advertiser. 4, November 1760

252 Ibid.

years later, these issues were still not resolved. A "creole lady" arrived in London, from the West Indies, with her enslaved twelve-year-old girl. As punishment for "some little fault," she stripped the girl naked and beat her "with a rattan, which made the poor creature all in a gore of blood." Hearing the girl's screams, some concerned people broke into the home "exclaiming against such acts of barbarity." But the creole woman counteracted their exclamations with her own, justifying her treatment of the girl since it was the way the enslaved, in the West Indies, were dealt with.[253]

In 1769, Scottish merchant Charles Stewart arrived in England with his personal servant James.[254] Two years later, around the age of thirty, James was baptized under the name of Summersett, later adopting the more popular spelling, "Somerset." In October 1771, Somerset's relationship with Stewart turned when he left Stewart and refused to return thus resulting in his seizure and impending departure to be sold in the British Caribbean. Somerset's friends united and contacted the abolitionist Granville Sharpe who sought a writ of habeas corpus from the Court of King's Bench. Chief Justice William Murray, Lord Mansfield eagerly pressed the parties to settle the case noting the "contract for sale of a slave is good," but in this case, "the person of the slave himself is immediately the object of inquiry."[255] The British court was faced with the dilemma of considering whether British courts should enforce the enslaved status created by American laws. This would mean adopting all the peculiarities of the institution of

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253 Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser, Monday January 9, 1764. There is more at play here than just the legalities of slavery, the power that white women yielded over girls will be discussed in the next chapter.

254 Somerset was captured in Africa and taken to the Americas on board a British slaver. Between the ages of eight and ten years old, James was purchased by Scottish merchant, Charles Stewart, and groomed to be his personal servant and valet.

255 Somerset v Stewart, May 14, 1772, The Somerset Case, Howell's State Trials, Vol. 20, Cols 1-6, 79-82

American slavery. Mansfield urged Stewart to settle the dispute on his own and free Somerset, but with the backing of wealthy British planters and financiers, Stewart felt he had the upper hand and would not. This left Mansfield to ponder, "Could a slave owner maintain control of a slave in England, against the will of the slave? Mansfield concluded they could not and asserted,

> So high an act of dominion must be recognized by the law of the country where it is used. The power of a master over his slave has been extremely different, in different countries. The state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political; but only positive law, which preserves its force long after the reasons, occasion, and time itself from whence it was created, is erased from memory, it's so odious, that nothing can be suffered to support it, but positive law. Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from a decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England; and therefore, the black must be discharged.[256]

With Lord Mansfield's ruling, Somerset walked out of the court and into the ether of eighteenth-century London, and history, a free man. What Lord Mansfield's ruling did not do was emancipate the thousands of individuals, including Black girls, held in bondage in England.

When Portuguese maritime trader Antam Gonçalves, and his men, first took an African woman hostage in the fifteenth century, they did so with an understanding that her darker hue and traditionalist faith warranted her enslavement, and the enslavement of those who embodied the same characteristics found in individuals from sub-Saharan Africa. As the English ventured into African Atlantic trade, they incorporated Iberian influences and their encounters with sub-Saharan Africans were informed by classical and mythical lore about the torrid zone that was informed by the Biblical curses. Within

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256 Ibid.

this framework, the stereotype of the fantastical African female was born, her body deemed consumable by European men and women.

This consumption is evident in the writings of travelers to the African continent and thus informed men and women back in England. Reading and internalizing the differences between themselves and those they read about in Africa and the new world, a hierarchical sense of self, based upon religion, beauty and sovereignty began to emerge, especially among English, Scottish Irish women as they were gifted African girls as objects of empire. In turn these African girls would be displayed in commissioned portraits, symbolizing Africa itself gifting England, in the form of an English woman, all that the riches the continent had to offer. But as the trade in African bodies began to increase in the eighteenth century, African girls slipped from a position of luxury to that of labor, her position at times closely managed by wealthy white women, whether in the British colonies or the metropole. Laws instituted to govern the bodies of the enslaved in the colonies, were considered in Parliament, but had no bearing on those held in bondage in England and her European environs.

The thirst for profit and labor in England's colonies in the Americas ignited men of meager means to seek their fortunes outside of England's borders in Africa supplying captives to waiting vessels bound for the West Indies, or in the West Indies as new world colonists controlling the labor of captive Africans. The acquisition of enslaved Africans by the English was not limited to the Gold Coast, and certainly not to the male bodies needed to supply growing sugar plantations. Although West Central Africa was a prime supplier of African women and girls to the new world during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during the eighteenth century, the Bight of Biafra would rise to

become the major supplier of African women and girls to Britain's colonies in the Americas.

Chapter 3: Akeiso and Esther

On a day like any other, in 1756, the adults went to work in the fields, while the children, unaware of the surmounting dangers in the forested Biafran hinterland, were left to the blissful innocence of their youthful play. In one swift, soundless movement, three kidnappers, two men and a woman, bounded over the compound wall, their pint-sized prey within their sights. The children, a boy and a girl, were swept up and swiftly carried away, never to see their beloved village again. The party traveled far and when night fell, they stopped at a house where they could rest. At dawn, they resumed their travels, continuing in the same manner as the previous day. On the third day, while they slept, the boy and the girl were torn apart, each left alone to grieve their incomprehensible separation and harrowing plight.

At the time of his and his sister's kidnapping, Olaudah Equiano was eleven years old. In his popular narrative, the African abolitionist weaves his account of captivity, passing from the hands of one enslaver to another, until he and his sister are united again by chance. Oh, the joy he felt at this fortuitous encounter, embracing so as not to be separated again. The siblings were even encouraged to be together, enjoying each other's familiar and safe company. That night they fell asleep, their enslaver lying between them with their small, clasped hands resting on his chest. But in the morning, she was gone again, lost to Equiano, and the reader, forever. What happened to his young sister, his childhood playmate, "sharer of his joys and sorrows?" Equiano laments this abrupt rupture, praying that she did not fall victim to the "African trader, the pestilential stench of a Guinea ship, the seasoning of the European colonies or the lash and lust of a brutal and relenting overseer."[257] And yet, in his account, the African abolitionist never once utters his sister's name.

Those who engaged in kidnapping children from the interior for the Atlantic trade were cunning, traveling in the shadows of the forest and under the cover of night so their activities

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[257] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa*, 40

would not be detected. When Equiano's kidnappers came upon a road, the boy's mood brightened, for he recognized his surroundings and knew they would come upon someone soon … and when he did, he cried out. The men swiftly covered his mouth, bound him and threw him in a sack. His sister's hands were also bound, and, according to Equiano, the kidnappers "stopped her mouth." The small group then continued their journey. What a curious choice of words. Equiano's young sister's mouth was stopped from making any sound - physically silenced by her kidnappers, and by Equiano's retelling, for he does not give her a voice. It is easy to imagine that she may have screamed or yelled out, however, Saidiya Hartman cautions us about the need to gain closure when confronting the violence of bondage and constructing a more favorable narrative to suit our own sympathies.[258] Although Equiano's sister is silenced, her apparitional presence, and disregard, is profoundly felt.

Drawing on Equiano's account of his and his sister's kidnapping from their village of Essaka in the Biafran hinterland, as well as the accounts of women who were captured in the region as children, this chapter first seeks to examine the various elements that contributed to the ways African girls entered domestic and overseas bondage from the Bight of Biafra; especially after 1730 when the trade in female bodies significantly increased in the region. One explanation for this demographic phenomenon centers on the kola nut and the trans-Saharan trade. Because the kola nut was revered in Igbo society, the trans-Saharan trade did not permeate the Biafran forest. In turn, female captives could not be fed into the trans-Saharan trade, a trade where female captives outnumbered males. Therefore, the Atlantic trade provided an outlet to absorb captive females who would then wind up in the British Caribbean or North American colonies.[259]

Another reason behind the proliferation of female captives in the transatlantic trade centered on the cultivation of the yam. For the Igbo, the yam was king, and the revered tuber was

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258 Saidiyah Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe 26*, Vol. 12, No. 2, June 2008, 14.

259 Ndubueze L. Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), 96. Nwokeji, G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 162-170

only cultivated by men. Unlike women in Senegambia, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone, Igbo women and girls occupied a lesser agricultural role, planting their crops of pumpkin, okra, maize, beans, pepper and cocoyam "between the spaces provided by the yam hills."[260] Because female agronomy did not center on the cultivation of yams, their labor was not equally valued and hence, they entered into the Atlantic slave trade more easily. But this view conflates the Igbo people into one cohesive group with one patrilineal cultural tradition. The overarching Igbo definition applies to several small polities that are both matrilineal and patrilineal, depending on the region they inhabit, and the distinctive response of each group to the Atlantic trade in captive bodies.

Warfare was also thought to lead to the enslavement of women and girls. Because the heads of male warriors were severed during battle, the resulting excess of females were sold into bondage.[261] Within this context, kinship is significant. Being without kin was essentially the first component of bondage in Sub-Saharan Africa.[262] In African societies, female captives were easily assimilated into communities as wives and establishing kinship through bearing children. But the Transatlantic slave trade provided a new market for war captives thus feeding females without kinship ties into domestic and overseas slavery. Scholars have weighed in on this subject. G. Ugo Nwokeji agrees that lack of kinship ties for women made them easier captives for the domestic and overseas slave trade. However, Ndubueze Mbah takes issue with Nwokeji's conclusions, citing his usage of Portuguese sources from the Kongo to allude to Biafran women's marginality in agricultural production that resulted in their enslavement. Mbah asserts that if we must rely upon the observances of Europeans to comprehend the costs of the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra, then we should look at the reports of British merchants in the region and not the

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260 Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965) 24-25

261 G. Ugo Nwokeji, The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra,161.

262 Cheryl Johnson-Odium, "Women and Gender in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *Women's History in Global Perspective, Volume 3*, Bonnie G. Smith, ed. (Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2005) 38.

Portuguese in the Kongo when examining the gendered performance of agricultural labor and the discerning value of that labor regarding the Atlantic trade.[263]

Therefore, it is imperative to comprehend the evolution of gender roles in the Bight of Biafra to understand the ways the region countered the European demand for captive Africans. In other words, emerging African masculinities contributed to the kidnapping, pawning and war captivity of African women and girls in the Bight of Biafra. Environmental factors, such as drought and famine also led to the enslavement of girls; albeit the methods sought to alleviate such hardships due to these natural occurrences were within the purview of men. Therefore, a nuanced diachronic approach is pertinent to the study of African history.[264] This approach, one centered on Africans and the African response to factors driving commerce towards the Atlantic, is necessary for objectively comprehending the rapidly changing demographic, political and spiritual changes in the region. I contend an African womanist perspective is also useful for examining this African Atlantic paradigm. Ifi Amadiume presents the notion of *nzagwalu* (which means answering back in the Igbo language) as a critique of Western feminist theory regarding African women. She argues that most African societies were matrilineal and did not become patrilineal until the introduction of colonialism in the nineteenth century. This matriarchal construction involved three factors, 1) women's control of the subsistence economy and the marketplace, 2) women's self-governance and 3) women's control of their own religion and culture, where they were closely involved with the education and socialization of girls.[265] But with the increased demand for bodies to labor in the Americas, I posit that the changing gender traditions in the African interior and along the coast shifted decades earlier as local merchants and leaders inserted themselves into the Atlantic trade with Europeans.

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263 Ndubueze L. Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, notes 97-100, 237. G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, 162-170

264 John N. Oriji, *Political Organization in Nigeria Since the Late Stone Age: A History of the Igbo People*, (New York: Palgrave McMillian, 2011) 18-19.

265 Ifi Amadiume, Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture, (London: Zed Books, 1997), 4, 29-51.

Various scholars have examined the changing dynamics of interior polities in response to the burgeoning demand for captives. Walter Hawthorne examines the migration of the Balanta people, in Guinea-Bissau, from the forested interior to the swampy marshlands of the coast. Their entry into the lucrative trade in captive bodies provided a steady source for iron to produce weapons and agricultural implements for rice production. This change towards the Atlantic economy also involved a change in traditional gender roles through trade, intermarriage and age grade reforms.[266] Edna Bay argues that women experienced a loss of authority and power as the Kingdom of Dahomey began to dominate the hinterland trade in captives beginning in the seventeenth century and Sandra Greene examines the decline of women's rights in the Anlo-Ewe due to the change in Gold Coast economies towards the Atlantic.[267] These inquiries consider the role of women in West African societies as they began to wane and a complementarity between gender roles began to grow. These feminine factors became threatened in the eighteenth century as African polities transformed to male centered hegemonies in order to control the commercial economies of the Biafran hinterland trade. Moreover, with trade interests focused towards the Atlantic coast, Europeans seeking trade opportunities in the Bight of Biafra had to adhere to the specific nuances of trade defined by local merchants and middlemen.

Because local Africans affected the market price for enslaved girls in the Bight of Biafra, the Bight of Benin and West Central Africa, the cost of captive individuals in these ports were cheaper than in the Gold Coast, Senegambia, and Sierra Leone. As a result, English trading companies and independent merchants went beyond the boundaries of the Gold Coast to enslave African females. This was accomplished through the usage of trade networks established by other Europeans vying for control of trade on the African coast, especially the Portuguese with whom

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266 Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast,* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003)

267 Edna G Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender Politics and Culture in the Kingdom of the Dahomey*, (Charlottesville; University of Virginia Press, 1998), 3-5, Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo -Ewe*, (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1966), 1-5

the English had a trade agreement with since the twelfth century. Whether supported by the monarchy or London financiers, the English made inroads on Africa's west coast utilizing networks first established by their Iberian allies. English trading companies not only interrupted the commerce in African captives on the Atlantic coast, they also began to monopolize trade in the Gold Coast encroaching on their Dutch rivals and vying for control over established trading posts and favor from local African leaders. In a vicious cycle reminiscent of the Iberian challenges to African trade, independent merchants, privateers, and pirates would challenge the English monopoly on trade in the Gold Coast and beyond during the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, English trading companies and their factors were crucial in acquiring captive bodies for British merchants and planters, as well as fulfilling requests by other European factions like the French and the Spanish. When acquiring girls for labor in the Americas, merchants made specific requests thus making the age between African childhood and womanhood, for Europeans, fluid. A girl could be classified as someone between the ages of six and ten while a woman, specifically those who could be visually identified as having reached puberty, between the ages of ten and thirteen, could be classified as a woman. Hence the commodified body of the African girl was sought for her future prospect of reproductive and physical labor, thus initiating her into a womanhood forcibly prescribed by her enslaved condition. Even more so, a critical examination of the historical record of transatlantic slavery is necessary since the definition of an African woman, and an African girl was left to the whim of apathetic European enslavers.

I Was Captured by "A Party of the Enemy"

Fi kan chali laa ge fi biamoa, Kan chali la age fi biamoam Kanbonka le jam la, ti ŋman biik be? Taa chali laa ge ti biamoa, Mi poom ka biik wariya, Mi laa chaali ayen m vuuk la, Mi poom ŋjman ka biik wariya, Mi poom ŋjman ka biik wariya.

No one runs away and leaves his/her children, you do not run away and abandon your own kind, with the presence of the raider, how can we have children again? We are running away while abandoning our children, I am running for my dear life, I do not have time for children anymore, I do not have time for children anymore. Buli / Bulisa song, North Central Ghana.[268]

Akeiso and her family lived on the banks of the great Imo River in the Cross River region of the interior of the Bight of Biafra. "Unclothed," she enjoyed assisting the adults when they hauled in the bounty from the river or guarding the fowls and chickens from hawks and other predators. When not engaged in chores, she and her counterparts would play in a clearing not far from family compounds while waiting for the adults to return from the fields. While at play, one day, "a party of the enemy" drove the children into an enclosed space, bound them and carried them away, their cries for help muffled by the vegetation of the forest. The kidnappers with their coffle of young captives traveled only at night, and by day they rested in spaces concealed from inquisitive eyes. On the dawn of the fifteenth day the vast Atlantic spread before them. Soon after their arrival on the coast, the children were ushered onto the vessels that would carry them away from their homes forever.[269]

As an enslaved woman on the Powell plantation in St. Ann, Jamaica, Akeiso, who would come to be known as Florence Hall, recounted the story of her captivity. Like Equiano and his young sister, she too was of the Igbo people and had not taken part in the nubility rites that would guide her and her age mates into womanhood and introduce them as integral members of the community. Because children were often left alone to play while adults worked away from their compounds, they were prime targets for slavers. It is interesting to note her assertion of being forcibly taken by those considered "enemies" of her people and then sold into slavery in Calabar, one of two slave ports in the region.[270] This sudden rupture, "kid-napping," was just one pathway

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268 Emmanuel Saboro, "Slavery, Memory and Orality: Analysis of Song Texts from Northern Ghana," PhD Thesis, University of Hull, 2014, Brown Digital Repository.

269 Florence Hall (Akeiso). "Memoir of the Life of Florence Hall, The Powel Family Papers, 1808-1820." Historical Society of Pennsylvania

270 Calabar, first named by the Spanish, was a major slave port during the Transatlantic slave trade

to enslavement for girls.[271] According to slave ship surgeon Alexander Falconbridge, most captives from the Bight of Biafra were kidnapped. While in the region he observed the hinterland slave markets where thousands of captive men, women and children were sold about every six weeks, including pregnant women who "happen to be so far advanced in their pregnancy, as to be delivered during their journey from the fairs to the coast."[272]

Esther did not endure the terror of being kidnapped. She bore the marks of a free person in her society and her father was of some prominence, having a "plantation of corn, yams, and tobacco."[273] He also owned many slaves. One day, her father sent her to visit her grandmother in

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era. By the eighteenth century, eighty-five percent of the ships frequenting the port were from London, Bristol and Liverpool. The main ethnic group transported from this port were Igbo. See: Randy Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar*, 35-36. The other major slaving port was on the island of Bonny. The Kingdom of Bonny first traded with the Portuguese in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Later, the English would frequent this island port to transfer enslaved Africans to their holdings in the Americas.

271 Tracing the etymology of the word kidnap to the seventeenth century, it meant to "snatch" a "child" away, specifically, "to steal children to provide servants and laborers in the American colonies." Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, Third Edition, Dublin: W.G. Jones, 1768

272 Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave trade on the Coast of Africa*, (London, J. Phillips, 1788), 13

273 Ibid. A caste system existed in pre-colonial Igbo society and its remnants are still felt today. The *diala*, are those who were freeborn, like Esther, and like Equiano, whose family owned slaves called *ohu*. These general slaves were absorbed into the family structure and could form kinship bonds. When discussing the family structure in Essake, Equiano explains, "Each master of a family has a large square piece of ground, surrounded with a moat or fence, or enclosed with a wall made of tempered red earth … within this are his houses to accommodate his family and slaves, which, if numerous, frequently present the appearance of a village … with us they do more work than other members of the community, even their masters, their food, clothing and lodging were nearly the same as theirs, (except that they were not permitted to eat with those who were free-born); and there was scarce any other difference between them than a superior degree of importance which the head of a family possesses in our state, and that authority, which, as such he exercises over every part of his household. Some of these slaves even have slaves under them as their own property, and for their own use." Interestingly, while enslaved in the home of a blacksmith, Equiano was mortified by not being able to eat with his enslaver's free-born children, a position he formerly enjoyed. The last caste, the *osu*, are individuals dedicated to the service of a dedicator's deity. According to Daniel Offiong, the *osu* system of slavery began when individuals utilized oracles and divination and it was conventional to use human sacrifice to appease the gods or deities. If a priest advised a devotee to sacrifice an osu for atonement, the devotee could go to the slave market and purchase such an individual. The osu's hands and feet were bound and his head shaved. One part of his body was smeared with *uhie*, a liquid from the park of a tree and *nzu*,

a village a day's journey from the coast. While she was there, the village was attacked by a "body of Negroes" (she knows not of what country) on whose approach she and all the women were sent into the woods. The warring party found them and carried away all who were able to travel. The elderly, and those who resisted removal, were put to death. On the third day Esther was sold to the White people…"[274] Her captors did not discriminate between the free and those classified as "slaves." In a testimony before the Select Committee in England, Isaac Parker recounted his time spent in the Bight of Biafra and an occasion where he went on a slave raid with the infamous chieftain and trader, Dick Ebro. Parker stated, "… we paddled up the rivers in the day time … when night came we put the canoes ashore, leveling two or three negroes in each canoe, the rest flying up to the village, taking hold of everyone we could see; and as we took them we handcuffed them and brought them down to the canoe; after we had done so we quitted the place and went farther up the river , and so during the second time; and we got to the amount … 45 slaves at that time."[275] Parker admits they "took man, woman and child as they could catch them."[276] His testimony describes the indiscriminate nature of slave raiding, by Africans and Europeans, capturing those they could easily overpower and disposing of those who were troublesome, elderly, or who could not fetch a fair market price.

The kidnapping of Akeiso and Esther, as well as Equiano and his sister, warrants an examination of the changing dynamics of trade in the Bight of Biafra due to the European and Anglo-American demand for African labor in the Caribbean and North American mainland. This

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a local chalk. Also, a part of the *osu's* body, an ear or a finger, was cut off to identify him as such. However, not all *osu* were used for human sacrifice and some individuals, usually those too poor to care for themselves or criminals, chose to become *osu*. Once they were able to inhabit the place where the *osu* lived, they belonged to the deity and thus became untouchable. The *osu* system was legally abolished in 1956. See: Daniel A. Offiong, "The Status of Slaves in Igbo and Ibibio of Nigeria," *Phylon*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1985), 50-52.

274 "The Narrative of Esther" by Esther. Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Vol. II. Dublin: 1793. 98-99.
Isaac Parker, Minutes of the Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee, ZHC 1/84, British Public Record Office. 123-124.

276 Ibid., 125

process of Atlanticization, a process from a West African perspective, that "entailed continuities and ruptures, including sustained engagement with transatlantic markets and metropoles as sources of gendering commodities; expansion of intraregional trade, kinship networks and military systems in ways that facilitated gendered redistribution of power, and a revolution in gender regimes."[277] Hence, the response to the European and later American demand in captive bodies increased during the eighteenth century and caused a shift in traditional gender roles and governance in the Biafran interior, and extends the hinterland space from the interior to the coast into the geopolitical and trading demesne of the Atlantic World.

To understand the Biafran interior's shift toward the Atlantic trade, we must first examine the causes for rapidly changing hinterland polities that began well before the eighteenth century. The fertile space of the Cross River region experienced an influx of migrants fleeing the military force and aggressive expansion of the Kingdom of Benin during the fifteenth century. By the seventeenth century, several groups - the Abam, Ohafia, Ada and Abribia to name a few, would establish settlements along the river pushing several native Ekoi and Ibibio peoples to the east and the west. Those who remained facilitated, through intermarriage, the creation of mixed Igbo Ibibio and Ekoi villages. These groups were also matrilineal, with women playing a critical role in the economies of their communities. Women in Igbo societies controlled certain spheres of Igbo life, were believed to possess superior spiritual acumen and were the heads of many traditional cults and shrines.[278] Through their participation in agriculture, weaving and trade, women gained status in their communities and were treated as *ndi ogalanya*, wealthy persons.[279]

Igbo women of standing who participated in agriculture and trade were central to the quotidian lives of girls. In addition to farming and commerce, women were responsible for teaching girls the intricacies of domesticity and female familial relationships. They also taught

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277 Ndubueze L. Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, 8

278 Don C. Ohadike, "Igbo Culture and History" in *Things Fall Apart*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1996), xviii

279 Ibid. In some Igbo societies, women married other women and "fathered" their own children.

girls herbalism, midwifery, and child-care. When they became of age, a young woman could seek admittance into the Omu society. Members of this powerful woman centered collective participated in politics, sitting on the council of elders and chiefs, and contributing their voice for the welfare of the community. They also imposed fines on those who disturbed the "peace of the marketplace" and dispensed judicial verdicts on women and individuals who broke the taboos of adultery and incest.[280] Hence, Igbo women's power, with respect to other women and the larger community, should be understood as a social dynamic on par with men's power during the precolonial period.[281]

But not all Igbo societies that migrated to the Cross River region were matrilineal. The Aro were a powerful state that settled along sections of the Imo River in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Through market dominance, land expansion and spiritual influence, the Aro minified women's traditional roles in communities where they were the primary wealth earners. The more powerful the Aro became, the more men in matrilineal societies subscribed to their campaigns of power and influence. To achieve this, the Aro subscribed to the concept of *mmuba*, an aspiration to increase the resources of labor and to strengthen the population through expansion and political aspirations.[282] What the Aro lacked within their own communities, they relied on the expertise from other groups to achieve specific commercial and geopolitical interests. One group, the matrilineal Ohafia, settled in the Cross River during the sixteenth century. They were known as fierce warriors, often engaging in military campaigns that included cutting off the head of their enemy as a rite of passage and battle trophy. The Aro would come to utilize the Ohafia and their military skills to respond to the increased demand for captives in the Americas. An Ohafia elder, Nna Agbai Ndukwe explains:

> Aro people revered Ohafia people and always came to us for aid in battles. Our soldiers were provided by the age-grades and every man was expected to go to war and bring

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280 Ibid.

281 Cheryl Johnson-Odim, "Women and Gender in the History of Sub-Saharan Africa," 15

282 Ndubueze L. Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, 63-64

> back a human head. When the Aro came to Ohafia for military aid, Ohafia would go to war, preoccupied with obtaining heads, while the Aro would be busy looting property and pillaging people … Ohafia people participated in the slave traffic, and sold slaves as well, even though it was the Aro that principally traded in slaves. Some Aro traders even came to Ohafia to buy captives … The Aro came with silver, cloth, guns, tobacco, alcohol … When Aro people purchased captives from us, they took them to Calabar. There is a river called Eze-Iyi Aku in Abiriba, where Ohafia people also took their captives to sell. The Eze-Iyo River was a point of no return; every slave that got on a boat there went to Calabar. Aro people usually came at night to meet our elders. They brought yards of cloths, alcohol, palm wine and ram …[283]

The elder's account illustrates the depth of the Aro trade network stretching from the interior to the Atlantic coast. However, what the elder does not recount is the changing gender roles in Ohafia due to the influence of the Aro. Men in Ohafia found newfound wealth in waging war on behalf of the Aro, thus emerging as dominant wealth earners. Moreover, the tradition of "cutting heads" was replaced by the attainment of captive individuals as warriors sought to attain *ufiem*; a heroism based on masculine rites of passage and the performance during raids and war. As women's economies decreased in Ohafia, women were forced to participate in slave raids, thus attaining *ufiem* and seen to possess favorable masculine qualities. Women's participation in warfare, slave raiding and slave trading can be attributed to women's adaptation to the changing gendered economies of trade and politics in the Biafran interior. The cutting off of male warrior heads resulted in an excess of females taken as war captives. Because they were not assimilated into the Ohafia as wives and mothers of children, they were without kinship ties and thus sold into domestic and overseas slavery.

For the Ohafia, warfare was but one factor that brought them under the growing network of the Aro confederacy. Another was membership into the male Ekpe secret society. The society functioned as a major commercial and cultural network that controlled major slave markets in the interior. Through commerce, exclusivity, and personal wealth, the Ekpe helped to facilitate political, economic and social transformation in the Biafran hinterland, therefore abating

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283 Ibid.

women's wealth and position in area markets and their communities. For instance, by the 1670's, the Bende Market was thriving. When French factor John Barbot visited the Bight of Biafra in 1682, he noted "a large market for slaves" three or four days away from the port of New Calabar.[284] It is not known when the Bende Market was established, but by the eighteenth century, it was a well-known slave market in the Biafran hinterland that was under the powerful Aro confederacy. Another popular market to trade enslaved captives was the Esuk Mba Slave Market in Akpabuyo, a short distance from present day Camaroon. The popular market depended upon slave raiding, as well as the sale of children, in exchange for copper bars, brass bells, tobacco and guns. After negotiations, captives were taken to the coast by canoe by merchants who controlled the inland trade and were slated for the markets at "Bonny and Old and New Calabar."[285] The port of Calabar was dominated by patrilineal Efik middlemen with connections to the interior. It was also the main embarkation point for Igbos bound for the British West Indies, the Chesapeake, the Carolinas and Georgia. According to Antera Duke, an infamous trader in the region, over a three year period, Efik merchants sold Europeans 15,000 enslaved Africans, 500,000 yams and one hundred tons of ivory, palm oil dyewood and pepper.[286] British ship surgeon Alexander Falconbridge noted, "from forty to two hundred negroes are generally purchased at a time by the black traders, according to the opulence of the buyers."[287] Captives were of all ages, "from a month to sixty years and upwards" and their desirability depended upon the prices they could be sold for in overseas markets.[288]

The Vlekete Slave Market was established in 1502 by local and European merchants in the town of Badagry, on the Biafran coast. According to local lore, Vlekete was the name of the

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284 John Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea,* (London, 1732), 381.

285 Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave trade on the Coast of Africa*, (London, 1788), 13

286 Stephen D. Behrendt, A.J.H. Lathan and David Northrup, *The Diary of Antera Duke: An Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-4

287 Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave trade on the Coast of Africa*. (London, 1788), 12.

288 Ibid., 13

place in Dahomey where the founders of Badagry migrated from.[289] Bound women and girls were sold at the Vlekete Slave Market, where on market day, as many as three hundred enslaved Africans were sold for iron bars, mirrors, gin, whiskey and guns. On non-market days, the space was dedicated to the shrine of Vlekete, the Vodun goddess of the sea. After their purchase, captives traveled the Ocean Path in single file until they reached Gberefu Island, where they drank from a sacred well and sang songs to help them forget their natal homelands and familial ties. Afterwards, they were divided and housed in barracoons, squat, dark holding pens, until their departure across the Atlantic.[290] By the eighteenth century, merchants from Liverpool and Bristol were frequent visitors to the seaside port town to engage in trade.

The low price of captives in the Bight of Biafra depended upon the vast network of merchants who were part of the Aro / Ekpe society. The Ekpe began "to take over many duties which previously had been regarded as the prerogative of the [Ezeala] (priests of the earth—goddess) and Amala (council of elders)."[291] This brings us to an examination of Aro dominance that led to the suppression of women's spiritual roles within Igbo communities. Chukwu, the supreme being and head of the Igbo pantheon was believed to be the "author of all blessings, including fertility, good health and prosperity."[292] As the Aro gained dominance in the interior, they established a shrine in a town named after the god – Arochukwu. A rivalry ensued between the male dominated ritual center and the traditional functions performed by the Ala, female

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289 Yussef Babatunde, "Vlekete Slave Market and the Atlantic Slave Trade in Badagry from 1600 to 1889," *African Journal of International Affairs & Development,* Vol.18, No.1, 50-61.

290 Lynn Harris, ed., Sea Ports and Sea Power: African Maritime Cultural Landscapes, (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 19-21. Alaba Simpson, "Some Reflections on Relics of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in the Historic Town of Badagry, Nigeria," *African Diaspora Archaeology Network*, June 2008, 1-10.

291 John N. Oriji, "Transformations in Igbo Cosmology during Slavery: A Study of the Geneses of Place Names, Totems and Taboos," *Cahiers d'etudes Africaines*, Vol. 196, 2009, 957. J.G.C. Allen, 1933 Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan, Vol I, (Enugu: Nigerian National Archives), 23-24.

292 Ibid.

practitioners devoted to the female earth-goddess who was central to women's spiritual work, and Amala, the council of elders.

The hinterland merchants exploited the popularity and belief in the oracle to monopolize trade in the interior and the Atlantic coast. Individuals began to make pilgrimages to the oracle in the hopes to resolve issues with poor crops, illness and infertility. The oracle also was crucial in dispensing judgement to those who sought justice. Hence many individuals visited the oracle looking for judicial abetment and resolution. Fines had to be paid in the form of bodies who were thought to be "eaten" by the deity, Chukwu. Those offered to the oracle disappeared into its mouth (a cave).[293] On the other side of the oracle was the red river, colored by the Aro, to make people believe that individuals had died. In actuality, captives traveled through a series of dark passages only to emerge and become bound by Aro merchants, then taken to coastal markets where "big men" would sell the captives to Europeans on the coast. If captives resisted, the services of professional Ibo warriors were obtained. The supernatural powers of the oracle were combined with the military might of devoted warriors to inspire fear and subjection of captives in the region.

Not all trade was through dominant middlemen with connections to the Biafran interior. Locals looking to trade in imported goods also frequented the markets or visited the coast when arriving vessels laden with merchandise from Europe and the Americas sought to trade. To trade, some local Africans engaged in the practice of pawnage. John Phipps, a factor for the Royal African Company commenting on commerce in Ketu described the practice as a, "custom among

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293 Certain conditions in the natural environment must exist for the establishment of oracles. According to S.R. Smith, these criteria are: 1) a quiet place away from main routes. 2) Natural features that inspire a sense of dread, such as rocks, caves, steep valleys with water, groves or dense bush. 3) A system by which travelling agents are familiar with local disputes and encourage reference for settlement to their oracles. 4) A clandestine method for the disposal of victims. For example, an individual sold into slavery would be announced as having been "eaten" by the oracle. See: K. Onwuku Dike, 39, and S.R. Smith, "The Ibo People," Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 1929, 160.

themselves for letting out money or money worth."[294] Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy define pawnage as "a legal category of social and economic dependency in which a person is held as collateral for a loan.[295] It was also another avenue that led to the enslavement of girls in West Africa. The practice of pawnage has a long history in West Africa. In the Bight of Biafra, it was known as *iwofa* among the Yoruba. In the Gold Coast among the Akan, it was known as *awowa*, *awubame* among the Ewe and *awoba* among the Ga. In Benin among the Edo it was known as *iyoha* and *gbamu* among the Fon. According to Lovejoy, the linguistic similarities suggest that the concept of pawnage was common along the coast, from the region of modern-day Ghana to south western Nigeria.[296] The likeness in terms suggests an antiquated institution entwined with a system of credit that expanded and adapted due to the Atlantic trade in African captives.

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294 John Phipps, c.1720. Public Record Office, C 113/274

295 Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, "Pawnage in Historical Perspective," in Lovejoy and Falola, eds., *Pawnage, Slavery* 1-26

296 Paul Lovejoy, "Pawnage, Debt, and 'Freedom' in Atlantic Africa During the Era of the Slave Trade: A Reassessment," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 2014. 58.

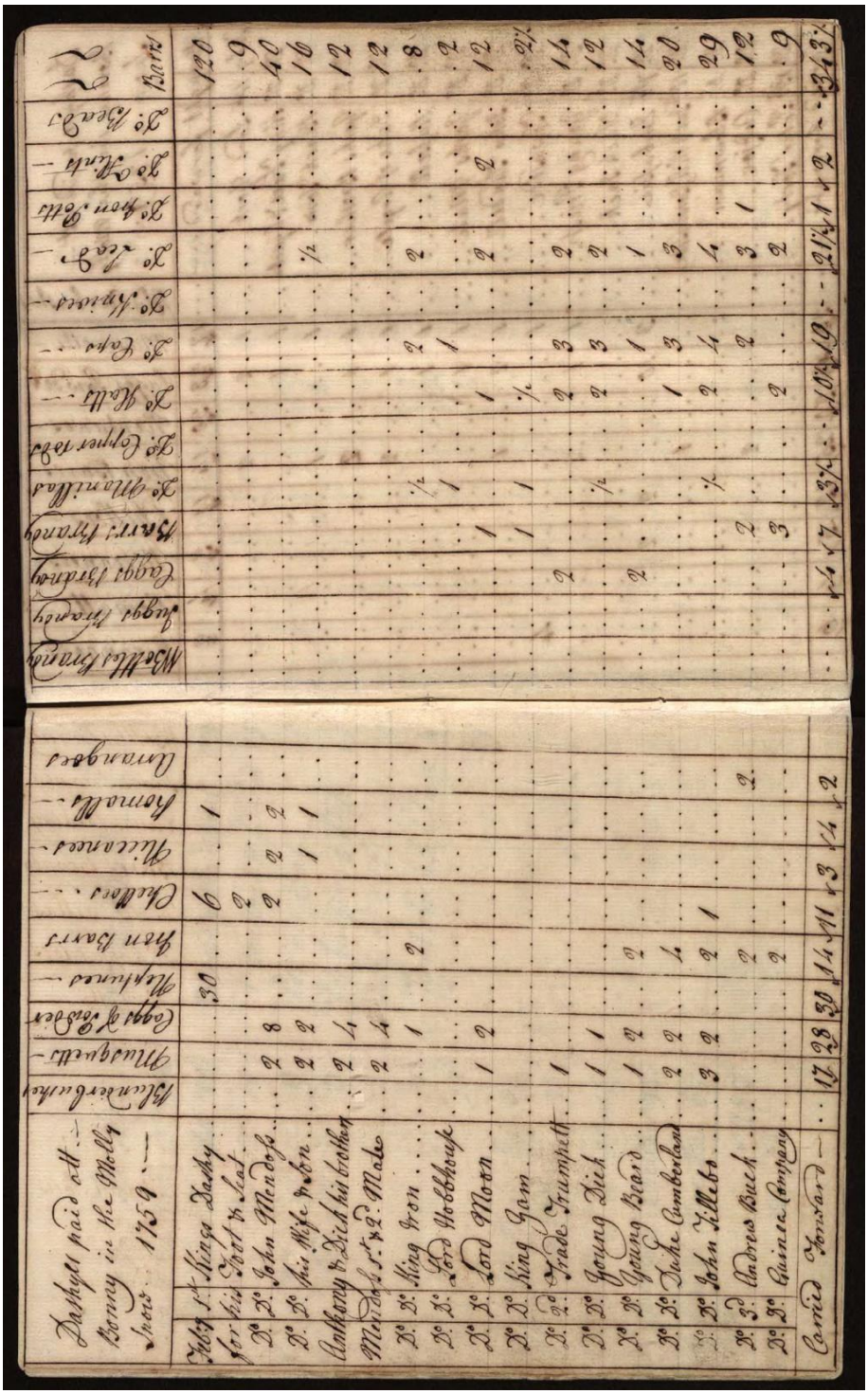

Image 2: Account book of the slave ship *Molly,* 1759: Ledger page showing a list of African traders in the left column and the commodities traded listed in columns at the top. The principal trading port for the *Molly* was the Bight of Biafra. National Maritime Museum Library, Greenwich, UK. TN74854-AML/Y/2.

Transatlantic Slave Trade Database Voyage #17441

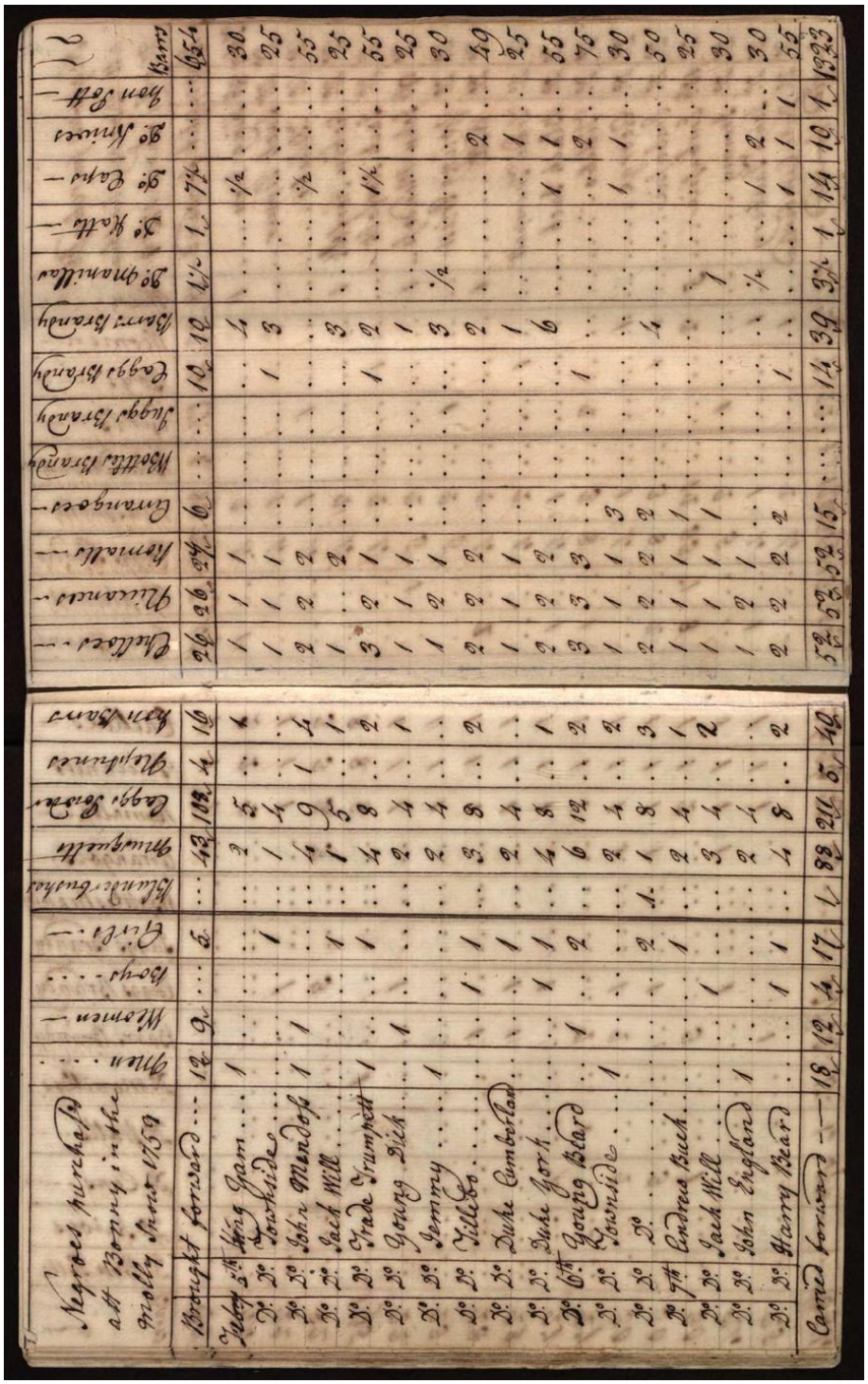

Image 3: Account book of the slave ship *Molly*, 1759: Ledger page showing a list of African traders in the left column and the captives received and commodities traded. The *Molly* arrived in Virginia with 238 captives, 49% of the captives were female. National Maritime Museum Library, Greenwich, UK. TN74854-AML/Y/2.

Although pawnage was based on credit, it too relied on social and kinship relationships to protect those being held as a pawn. While in the Gold Coast in 1752, Richard Edwards observed "fathers pawn their children, for they rely on the descendants of the female branches of the family, as in that case they are sure of the blood."[297] Edwards was referring to the matrilineal Akan who traced lineage through the female familial line and the importance of kinship in these circumstances.[298] While in Ouidah, Bosman noted that parents did not willingly place their children as pawns unless they "were under conditions of necessity, or some great crime."[299] This included environmental factors, like famine and drought, that necessitated the pawning of an older child in exchange for food for the family. With one less mouth to feed, families could concentrate on their immediate needs while the pawned child worked off the family's debt. Once the dept was fulfilled the child was returned to her family. Although this seemed ideal, the practice of pawnage often distorted the lines of custom and communication between European merchants and traders along the coast, with a percentage of girls winding up enslaved and transported across the Atlantic. Hence, English ideas about pawnage differed from the long-established African custom. Bristol slave captain, James Fraser affirmed in 1790, "every pawn that is received is considered a slave, until he is redeemed – if their friends refuse, or are not able to redeem them, they are carried off and sold." Robert Hume found fault with his countryman's declaration, which caused a considerable amount of conflict with locals. "I would not carry them off for fear of injuring my future voyages or my interest with the natives," Hume asserted. Although it was general practice to send pawns back to shore once a vessel was prepared to sail, this was not always the case. In 1788 local merchants in Cameroon seized the captain and crew of two English ships that tried to sail with thirty pawns onboard. Later, the two captains testified that

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297 Testimony of Richard Edwards in Sheila Lambert, *Sessional Papers*, LXIX, 44

298 Not all groups in the Gold Coast were matrilineal. The Mole-Dagbani, Ewe and Ga-Adangme were patrilineal, tracing lineage through the father's familial line. Akosua Adoma Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana: From the 15th to the 19th Century*, (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004), 111.

299 William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 364.

their expeditions had been "entirely ruined" because local merchants declared that they would not trade with them or pay the debts of the pawns until their "sons and daughters and &c. are returned."[300] Pawnage did not thrive where a centralized authority existed, like in the port of Ouidah, which was controlled by the Kingdom of Dahomey after 1727 or the port of Bonny throughout its operation.[301] In areas where Islamic law took precedence, pawnage was not a significant part of trade and was only practiced in the case of exchanging non-Muslims who were indebted to those who practiced the Islamic faith.

British Trading Companies, Independent Merchants, and the African Atlantic Trade

When examining the activities of the English in West Africa, we must look beyond the boundaries of the Gold Coast to examine their immersion in the business of slaving and their ongoing relations with other Europeans trading in Africa. English factors working on behalf of trading companies and independent merchants frequented the west coast of Africa in order to trade in ivory, palm oil, cotton cloth, pepper and other commodities, as well as to acquire captives to labor in American colonies. But the English, as well as other Europeans, could not successfully trade on the continent's west coast without adhering to the particular rules of trade established by local African leaders and merchants. Alison Games contends the Mediterranean is where the English first gained experience in large scale trade in an alien and inhospitable environment.[302] However, English merchants, who enjoyed trading privileges granted by the Portuguese, had been perfecting their commercial perspicacity by trading along Africa's west coast and frequenting Arguin and Elmina since the late fifteenth century.

Witnessing the success of the Portuguese and Dutch trade in West Africa, the English monarchy turned its scepter towards the continent's west coast during the seventeenth century. In

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300 Letter of James McGauty, William Willoughby and Isaac Nixen, Mach 1788, Lambert, *Sessional Papers*, LXIX, 318.

301 Paul Lovejoy and David Richardson, "The Business of Slaving: Pawnage in Western Africa, c. 1600-1810." *Journal of African History*, Vol. 42, No. 1, (2001). 68

302 Ibid.

1618, James I granted Sir Robert Rich, and a group of thirty financiers, who would come to be known as the Company of Adventurers of London Trading into Parts of Africa, "control over the trade on the explored coast south of Barbary."[303] There is speculation that the company was interested in obtaining captives for the Virginia colony in North America. It is not clear from the records, however, if this plan was ever realized. On August 20, 1619, the *White Lion*, a Dutch vessel, arrived in Point Comfort, Virginia with twenty to thirty captive Africans. The captives were part of a larger group of enslaved individuals from Angola who were taken from the Portuguese vessel, the *Sao João Bautista*. The ship was bound for Vera Cruz when it was attacked by two Dutch privateering vessels, the *White Lion*, and the *Treasurer*. Out of the sixty captives taken from the Portuguese, twenty to thirty were taken to the fledgling Virginia colony.[304]

With a focus on obtaining labor for the British Caribbean and North American mainland, English commercial activities in West Africa were split between formal trading companies and individual merchants acting in their own interests. Commissioned by investors in 1620, Richard

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303 Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Vol I, 78.

304 Beth Austin, "1619: Virginia's First Africans," *Hampton History Museum*, 2019. There is some tension surrounding the actual arrival of Africans to the North American mainland. The insistence of scholars of the date of 1619 as the arrival of captive Africans to North America - in the colony of Jamestown - ignores the French and Spanish colonies settled during the 16th century. When Cabeça De Vaca explored Florida in 1528, it is believed two Africans accompanied him. When Hernando DeSoto arrived in Florida in 1539, African captives accompanied him, as well as Tristan de Luna when he arrived in Pensacola Bay in 1559. According to Herbert Ingram Priestly, Spanish soldiers who accompanied de Luna demanded at least one servant each. However, it wasn't until Pedro Menéndez de Aviles founded the first permanent settlement in Saint Augustine in 1565 that captive Africans began to arrive in significant numbers. African captives were also present in the Spanish colony of Saint Elena on what is now Parris Island, South Carolina. The settlement was once the capital of Spanish Florida, from 1566 until it was abandoned in 1587 due to lack of interest from the Spanish crown and numerous attacks from local Native American tribes. During the Seven Years War, the British seized Spanish Cuba and the Philippines. To reclaim their land the Spanish was forced to cede Florida, solidified by the first Treaty of Paris on February 10, 1763. This strategic move by the British stemmed the tide of runaway enslaved Africans and African Americans who sought freedom with the Spanish in exchange for military service to fight against the English. See: Edwin L. Williams Jr., "Negro Slavery in Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2,) Oct. 1949, 93-110, Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1999, and John K. Thornton. "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion." *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (1991): 1101-113.

Jobson set out from England to venture down the Gambia River to search for gold and access trade noting,

> They [the Portuguese and mixed race middlemen] doe generally employ themselves in buying such commodities the countrey affords, wherein especially they covet the country people, who are sold unto them, when they commit offenses … but the black people are bought away by their own nation, and by them either carried or sold unto the Spaniard, for him to carry into the West Indies, to remain as slaves, either in their Mines, or in other servile uses, they in those countries put them to.[305]

Jobson recognized the dominance African middlemen and the Portuguese had over trade in Guinea. He also sought to prove that the English were not like the Spanish, solely purchasing captives for labor in the Spanish Americas. The growth of plantations in the Caribbean and North American mainland, however, would initiate a demand for captives; a lucrative enterprise that English merchants could not ignore. Later, in 1631 under Charles I, a new charter was formed giving Sir Richard Young, Sir Kenelm Digby and other financiers "the sole trade to the coast of Guinea, Binny (Benin) and Angola; between Cape Blanca and the Cape of Good Hope for a period of thirty years.[306] The English saw no problem infringing on regions where the Portuguese and Dutch already established trade relations with local merchants and chiefs in order to capitalize on the trade in African commodities and African bodies.

By strategically establishing trading posts near well-traveled commercial routes, the English hoped to thwart the trade of independent English merchants and other European kingdoms. This was a bold strategy considering they were insecure about their hold on trade and the competition from other Europeans. In a declaration dated January 12, 1662, the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading to Africa expressed their concerns over the fragility of the African trade and its susceptibility to their European rivals. In turn, England's colonies in the Caribbean were in danger of floundering due to "want of that usual supply of servants which they

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305 Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade or a Discovery of the River Gambra, and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians*, (London, 1623), 35-36

306 George Cawston and A. H. Keane, *The Early Chartered Companies*, (London, 1896) 229-230, Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Vol. I, 80.

have hitherto had from Africa."[307] Contentions with the Spanish and French increased the number of islands that came under British rule, including Jamaica in 1655, and planters were in desperate need of labor. Their proposed solution was to establish a corporation "consisting of persons of honour and experience" that was supported by the monarchy and members of the Stuart family.[308] The support of James I would allow investors to trade from Cape Blanco (in Mauritania) to Cape de bona Esperanza (in South Africa). The declaration served as an open call to English investors within a twenty-mile radius of London who could afford the £400 fee to enjoy the benefits of membership, prestige, and commerce in Africa.[309]

With financiers supporting West African trade, English factors began to encroach on the space and commercial interests of other Europeans, as well as local Africans. Moreover, European rivalries played out on the West African stage during the latter part of the seventeenth century. England's conflict with the Dutch, as well as the Swedes, had a global impact affecting holdings on the continent and in the Americas. In 1665 the English attacked Cape Coast Castle forcibly taking it from the Swedes. The fort located on a beach in view of Elmina would become the British administrative center in West Africa and continued to be so well into the late nineteenth century. The Anglo-Dutch conflict and counterattacks on English trading posts caused the Company of Royal Adventurers to fall into debt.[310] Again, this did not hinder English trading

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307 Declaration of the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading to Africa, January 12, 1662, Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Vol. I, 157-158.

308 Ibid.

309 Ibid.

310 England's conflict with the Dutch, as well as the Swedes, had a global impact affecting holdings on the continent and in the Americas. In 1665 the English attacked Cape Coast Castle forcibly taking it from the Swedes. The fort located on a beach in view of Elmina would become the British administrative center in West Africa and continued to be so well into the late nineteenth century. In the Volta region, Dutch Admiral De Ruyter would attack and seize Fort Coramantin (later renamed Fort Amsterdam) in retaliation for the seizure of several Dutch holdings by the English. The unrest also included local chiefs and middlemen and affected trade in the area. Prominent African merchant John Cabessa took his own life rather than be imprisoned by the Dutch during the attack. Upon seeing the English flag of truce, a mortified Cabessa cut off the head of the man who presented it. Immediately after he "with his own hanger cut his own throat."

efforts. In 1668 the Gambia Adventurers were founded in London and the trading company was granted a ten-year charter to trade north of the Bight of Benin. When the charter expired, the company was dissolved into the Royal African Company (RAC). The RAC, founded by Charles II in 1660, was given license to establish trading forts backed by British militia and was also granted permission to impose martial law when threatened by European and local African rivals. Because of the Atlantic trade with Europeans, the African economic and political landscape was rapidly changing from mercantile to an imperial social political formation with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few chiefs and merchants. Europeans often the catalyst of local conflicts found themselves in the middle of such tensions. The Komenda Wars, from 1694 to 1700, in the Gold Coast, are representative of the burgeoning Anglo-Dutch conflict in the Gold Coast and tensions with local Africans. These changes are also indicative of the demand for African bodies, by Europeans, which began to exceed exports of gold in the region.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 ushered in a new era for the English monarchy and adversely affected the trade monopoly of the RAC. In 1697, Parliament passed the Trade with Africa Act allowing independent merchants from London, Liverpool, Bristol and the colonial Americas, who could afford the ten percent levy on goods imported from the continent, to trade freely on the African coast. Known as "ten percenters" or "ten percent men," these independent merchants began flooding British trading forts in West Africa, at times exceeding the number of the RAC's ships ready for trade. By 1713 the English would become a dominant force in West Africa, establishing small trading posts, in addition to large factories - in Senegal along the banks of the Gambia River, on Sherbro Island and Bunce Island in Sierra Leone, Old and New Calabar

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The Dutch offered a great reward for the head of Cabessa but instead, his countrymen honorably buried him at Old Coramantin. English troops admired Cabessa's heroic actions against the Dutch and reported back to officials in London that he was "truer to the English than any of His Majesty's subjects there." W. Noel Sainsbury, ed. *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America, and West Indies, 1661-1668*. (London: Longman and Co., Paternoster Row, 1880) xxx - xxxi

in the Bight of Biafra, Whydah and Lagos in the Bight of Benin and Luango in West Central Africa. During his travels in Guinea, Francis Moore commented,

> The Fort is called James Fort and is the chief Settlement that the Royal African Company have in this River. This Fort keeps the Right of Trading to the River Gambia for the Company, and consequently for the Subjects of England. Were this once in the Hands of the French, who, I am very well inform'd in the Year 1719 would have purchas'd it for the Mississippi Company, could they have obtained Leave for the so doing, they would then exclude not only the Company, but all other Nations, from Trading hither, as they already have from the Coast of Senegal, where they maintain an exclusive Trade by Force, and take all Ships. This they justify by two forts, which they possess on the Coast of Senegal … [St. Louis and Goreé].[311]

Moore continues to expound upon Parliament's decision to extend the trade to all of "his Majesty's people" as long as they are able to pay the required ten percent to do so. This payment was used for the upkeep and the security of the trading posts or else the fort would "fall into the hands of foreigners."[312] In the Gold Coast alone, sixty European trading forts and lodges had been established during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; all while abiding by the regulations set by local African rulers and middlemen.

A series of letters written by the members of the English trading companies to various mariners, merchants and potential factors commissioned to do business in West Africa illustrate the complexities of trade between the metropole, Africa and the Caribbean, that at times are dependent upon international relations. These letters also outline specific requirements for female captives that hinge on racial and sexual biases and perversions that English men harbored for African females, thus raising questions about the type of labor expected of adolescent and teenaged African girls by English, as well as other European, enslavers. In a letter penned to James Pope on September 17, 1651, members of the Guinea company advised the factor of the outfitting of the *Friendship* for trade in Africa. Before his trip, he was to seek out Richard Swan "who hath had experience for many years of the trade with Negars and Portugals at Sierra

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311 Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa*, London, 1738. 16.

312 Ibid.

Leone."[313] After arriving on the coast, Pope was to stop at Rufisque to inform people he was there to trade along the Gambia River, looking for wax, hides and elephant teeth. Pope was also tasked with establishing a trading post along the river and to settle debts with two merchants, Francisco Vaz de Franca and Adreas Perdegon; possibly two Afro-Portuguese middlemen. Lastly, the men of the Guinea Company asked Pope to purchase "15-20 young lusty Negars of about 15 years of age." Preferences for gender were not mentioned.

In a follow up letter written to Bartholomew Haward in December, the Company men advised Haward that he was to sail to Guinea and meet the *Friendship.* Haward was assured that the vessel had been outfitted specifically for transporting "so many negars as [the] ship could carry" And that shackles and bolts had been affixed to the ship, since captives, according to the London financiers, were known to be rebellious.[314] To prevent this, the Company advised Haward to have plenty of food and water so the captives would not rise up against him as they were headed to Barbados for sale. If he could not sell them in Barbados, he was to sell the captives where possible, and in return receive payment in indigo or sugar. Francis Soane also received a letter from the Guinea Company men, informing him of the ship sailing from Guinea with captives and cattle for sale in Barbados. In return for the cargo, he was to pay the men in sugar. Afterwards the ship would sail home to London only to be outfitted again for trade on the African coast.[315]

In the minutes laid out by the RAC, on May 14, 1720, provisions were outlined for dealing with factors on the African coast. For example, every six months the company was to send out a supply of provisions that included cases of Madeira wine. The company also expressed

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313 The Guinea Company to James Pope, June 1651. Donnan. *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America.* Vol. 2, 126

314 The Guinea Company to Bartholomew Haward, December 1651. Ibid., 129.

315 On his return from London, Haward was to retrieve a case of glass beads, probably derived from Venice. For trade in West Africa. These trade beads were used as a form of currency and could be used for goods, services and the sale of captives. Lois Sherr Dublin, *The History of Beads: From 30,000 BC to the Present*, (New York, H.N. Abrams, 1987), 119-124

the need for caution when choosing factors to be sent abroad. Upon their approval, a letter would be relayed to specific persons in Lisbon, as well as in Brazil, notifying them of the factor's permission to trade in West central Africa on behalf of the RAC. Doing so would also affect the prices for captives, allowing factors of the RAC to purchase captives cheaply. One such factor was Playden Onely who sought to negotiate a contract with Lisbon merchants for:

> 500 annually, small slaves male and female from 6 to 10 years old, to be delivered at St. Iago [Cape Verde] at £10 per head, in the River Gambia at £9, at Lisbon at £15, to be paid for at Lisbon one month after delivery, at the rate of 5 sh: 6 d mill rec [rei]. … In case the slaves are delivered in the River Gambia, or at St. Iago, the payments are to be made in England by the Agents or Corespnd'ts of the contractors in two months after the Certificates of such delivery shall be by the Company presented to the said Contractors Agents in London.[316]

Onely also requested the delivery of 1000 adult captives annually, from the ages of twelve to forty and evenly distributed between genders. Each captive was to be delivered to St. Iago at £18 per head and readied for shipment to Brazil. In a separate resolution, the RAC proposed to let Onely have the freedom to work with an English factor in Lisbon in order to deliver an undetermined quantity of captive Africans to St. Thomas — £20 per head for men and women, 12-40 years old, and boys and girls, 7-10 years old at £14 per head. Upon his success, Onely requested a gratuity, in proportion for his services to the RAC.[317]

Like the Bight of Benin and the Bight of Biafra, the British looked to the ports of Loango, Cabinda and Malimba to acquire captives at favorable market prices during the eighteenth century.[318] The British were discouraged from trafficking on the Angolan coast by the Portuguese, but Loango was a free trade region with a steady supply of captives from the Angolan interior.[319] Captain Richard Prankard, of the *Union*, arrived in Angola in 1732. Working

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316 Playden Onely to the Royal African Company, 1721, Donnan. *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America.* Vol. 2, xviii, 257-58.

317 Ibid.

318 Arsene Francouer Nganga, "La Compagnie royale d'Afrique et les commerçants négriers anglaise sur la baie de Loango (entre 1650 et 1838), *Études Caribéennes*, Vol. 42, April 2009

319 Ibid.

with fellow Englishman, Captain Williams, the seamen were advised to purchase girls, "aiming chiefly at the females from 10-14 years of age." Afterwards he was to set sail for Cape Lopez, on the coast of Gabon to trade for wax, ivory, redwood, and more female captives. However, it is the next set of instructions that deserve further analysis juxtaposed against racial discourses during the eighteenth century. For the owners of the slaving vessel warned Prankard "to observe the girls, and boys, "be very black and handsome."[320] Also, if he did not have enough provisions to proceed to Cadiz, he was to stop at Annabona (Annobon), off the coast of present-day Equatorial Guinea, to restock. The request for ebony hued child captives is not unusual. When the *Post Boy* out of Bristol arrived in Jamaica in 1736, John Merewether commented on the 350 captives who were "proper for the Havanas and Cuba." Merewether goes on to affirm that the financiers preferred girls, and furthermore, "we shall take those who are not too much on the yellow cast, to which these country slaves are subject."[321]

Perhaps Merewether was responding to the various hues of Africans to be found across the continent. But for the English, there were parallels between the biblical origins of blackness and the often-overlooked relationship between labor and skin color. Those whose skins were darkened by the sun worked the land, traveled or spent a significant amount of time outdoors, like the "sunne-burnt pilgrim, the sun-tand slave or the tawnie gardener with sunne-burnt hands."[322] With the establishment of plantations and farms in the Caribbean and on the North American mainland, Sunjata Iyengar suggests, a myth emerges relating dark skin and other physical features to an "inherited destiny" of slave labor on one hand and ethnic difference on the other.[323] During the Northwest Passage in 1577, sailor Dionise Settle happened upon a dark-skinned Inuit and exclaimed his "colour is not much unlike the Sunne burnt countrey man, who laboureth daily in

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320 Owners of the *Union* to Captain Richard Prankard. Bristol, January 29, 1732/3. *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America.* Vol. 2. 444-445

321 John Merewether to Peter Burrell, Jamaica, September 6, 1736. Ibid., 459-460

322 Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 11

323 Ibid.

the Sunne for his living."[324] According to Iyengar, the sailor's words "domesticate the strange and evoke English hierarchies of rank and region."[325] Merchants and sea captains did the same when evaluating the African body. The darker the African female, the more she was associated with agricultural labor, and this labor would be marketed alongside her reproductive worth.

In addition to skin hue, English traders used other physical traits to discern a child from an adult. The measurement of four feet, four inches tall was the gauge English captains and merchants used to differentiate a child from an adult.[326] Adolescents were not classified as children and were generally grouped with adults and noted as "men-boys" or "women-girls."[327] Based on the specifications outlined by the RAC and English financiers, the ages of captive children fluctuated depending upon the enslaver's whims. "Small slaves," according to Onely, were between the ages of six and ten, while girls twelve and over were classified as adults. Financiers backing Prankard and Williams were specifically interested in girls ages ten to fourteen, the ages when girls reached puberty. Specific demands based on the onset of a girl's menses was indicative of slavers' concerns with female sexual and reproductive labor to ensure the futurity of the institution of bondage, which in turn was supported by slave codes and colonial legislation in the Caribbean and North America. Hence this demand was common when dealing with captive girls, some financiers going further to request the certainty of their virginity. In 1713, after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, the English was granted the Spanish asiento, license to trade, to supply 4,800 African captives annually to Spain's colonies in the Americas for the next thirty years. The South Sea Company (SSC) was established to handle the venture.[328] In

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324 Ibid.

325 Ibid.

326 Audra Duptee, "A Great Many Boys and Girls," in *The Igbo in the Atlantic World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016). 113.

327 Ibid.

328 In 1711 Britain had created the South Sea Company to reduce debt and to trade with the Spanish America, but that commerce was illegal without a permit from Spain, and the only existing permit was the Asiento for the slave trade, so at the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 Britain obtained the transfer of the Asiento contract from French to British hands for the next 30 years. The South Sea

1717, the company received a request for women, ages sixteen to 20 years old and girls, ages twelve to fifteen. They were to be taken to Curaçao or the Guinea coast. In addition to the request for the captives to be from Angola, the SSC advised factors that the females were to be "as near as possible to be all Virgins."[329] This is a curious supplication and begs further inquiry as to its purpose. In requesting that female captives be virgins, were factors aware of the physical, sexual, and psychological violence African women and girls experienced at the hands of European and African enslavers? If a woman or girl was sexually violated, would she be considered "damaged goods," in the eyes of merchants and thus her worth diminished in specific markets on the coast and in the Americas? Because the captive females were destined for the Spanish American colonies, was the request for their virginity linked to the Christian beliefs of their Iberian enslavers? Or did the request denote something more sinister, a request for virgin girls by sexual predators hiding behind elite titles and monied legacies. After the captain filled his quota for female captives, he set sail for the West Indies. While in port the SSC further advised,

> Children generally sell best on the Windward Coast, where the people are very poor, and few can reach the price of a grown Negro. So that if the Company should think fit to Order any of their Ships from Africa, when they have too many Children to Touch at Barbados and deliver some of them to the Company's Agents there, they would probably yield a better price there than Else where and farther enable persons by the purchase thereof, to Carry on the Licensed Trade to the Windward Coasts.[330]

During the eighteenth century, planters in England's Caribbean colonies began to complain about the shortage of labor provided to their plantations, citing the Spanish asiento as the cause. Hence planters were desperate and children, who did not sell in Barbados or Jamaica, were appreciated in other markets, like St. Lucia and St. Vincent, as well as the French (slave) markets of Martinique, Grenada, and Trinidad.

Company: Minutes of the Committee of Correspondence. Tuesday, 22d October 1717

329 Ibid.

330 Ibid.

Mismanagement and insular tensions would lead to the dissolution of the RAC by an act of Parliament in 1750. The Company of Merchants Trading in Africa (CMTA) would absorb its interests in West Africa. In addition to protecting free trade and avoiding competition between the newly formed company and private merchants, the CMTA was also charged with assisting private merchants with planning and implementing slaving voyages, keeping British forts on the coast militarily equipped and supplied with African captives and selling those African captives to interested independent parties. Additionally, the company was to keep relations cordial with local African communities. This included paying rent for leased land, paying tribute to chiefs, and participating in local courts. However, this task proved to be more difficult than the British anticipated, especially in terms of labor. So, the CMTA resorted to methods previously practiced by their predecessors and using company slaves as their main labor source.[331] At Cape Coast Castle, company slaves were critical to facilitating the English slave trade. Many company slaves were considered outsiders, most likely sold into Atlantic slavery and did not have kinship networks in the region.[332] Although the English utilized captive Africans in the western sense of slavery — as property, they had to abide by West African customs so that those enslaved retained important rights. Company slaves received a subsistence wage, worked set hours and integrated themselves within Cape Coast society.[333]

As the preference for enslaved Africans from the Gold Coast grew in demand in England's overseas colonies, Fort William the newly built British fort, east of Cape Coast Castle in the fishing village of Annamaboe, would emerge as a "training center" for company slaves, as well as a major supplier of captive Africans. Eno Baisie Kurentsi, also known as John Corantee, was the son of a local Fante chief. At a young age he was given to British officials at Cape Coast

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331 Ty M. Reese, "Facilitating the Slave Trade: Company Slaves at Cape Coast Castle, 1750-1807," *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2010. 363.

332 In many societies in West Africa, there is a distinction between born and purchased slaves. Someone born into slavery lived within established kinship networks. Those who were purchased were considered outsiders and often sold into domestic or overseas bondage.

333 Ibid., 364

Castle to be educated in English language and culture. In time he returned to Annamaboe and became a powerful middleman with strong trade networks reaching far into the interior. Rebecca Shumaway contends the most egregious oversight in the existing literature about southern Ghana during the transatlantic slave trade is the lack of attention to the town of Anamaboe.[334] The English at Fort William transported more enslaved Africans to the Americas than any other English fort in the region, including Elmina and Cape Coast.[335] This was in part due to the activities of Coramantee and other middlemen, hinterland conflicts as well and the expansion of the Fante confederacy and the Asante kingdom. The fort would remain a major point of embarkation for captive Africans until the cessation of the trade in captives, by the British, in 1807.

Under the British flag, it is estimated as many as three million captive men, women and children were transported across the Atlantic, the highest number, 832,044, between the years 1751 and 1755. Of those enslaved and transported to the British Caribbean, the highest numbers came from the Bight of Biafra (781,770), followed by the Gold Coast (604,686), then West Central Africa (321,527). But the numbers for people transported to the Chesapeake and Carolinas do not reflect the same. The British transported the highest numbers of captives to North America from the Senegambia region.

Table 1: British Estimated Slave Trade Totals to the British West Indies, 1626-1800 [336]

Bight of Biafra	Gold Coast	West Central Africa	Bight of Benin	Senegambia	Sierra Leone
781,770	604,686	321,527	313,690	127,209	113,158

334 Rebecca Shumway. *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014). 4

335 Ibid.

336 Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates. Estimates are from the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database. Numbers from West Central Africa and the Bight of Benin are from 1651 to 1800.

Table 2: British Estimated Slave Trade Totals to North America, 1626-1800 [337]

Senegambia	Bight of Biafra	West Central Africa	Gold Coast	Sierra Leone	Bight of Benin
78,964	77,030	64,743	29,199	20,640	6,943

The main destination for captives from the Bight of Biafra was Jamaica with 317,481 arriving between 1651-1800. This number is just 4,000 captives shy of the 321,651 enslaved individuals who arrived on the island from the Gold Coast. Although officials in London applauded officers at Cape Coast Castle for filling their cargoes with children exclaiming: "We like well your method of putting some small boys and girls ten years and upwards aboard our own ships and above ye complement we intended them for," captive girls from the Gold Coast did not make up significant numbers of the enslaved, like in the Bight of Biafra.[338] Nevertheless, as more islands came under the British crown, enslaved Africans were immediately transported there to labor on sugar cane plantations and sustenance farms. These newly arrived Africans were added to the already enslaved population left behind by former European power. The indication of "other BWI," British west Indies, in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) denotes the flaws of the trade in captive bodies from Africa. Not all record keepers were meticulous in their notations resulting in partial records, and scattered lives, in the historiography of the slave trade.

Table 3: Estimated Captive Totals to the British West Indies from the Bight of Biafra, 1626-1800

Jamaica (1651-1800)	Barbados (1626-1800)	Dominica (1751-1800)	St. Kitts (1651-1800)	Grenada (1751-1800)	Antigua (1676-1800)
317,481	171,231	70,452	62,650	49,401	44,112

337 Numbers from West Central Africa are from 1626-1800, The Bight of Biafra and Senegambia, 1651-1800, The Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin, 1676-1800 and Sierra Leone, 1701-1800.

338 RAC, London, to Cape Coast Castle, 28 June,1709, T70 /51, f.107

St. Vincent (1751-1800)	Other BWI (1626-1800)	Montserrat & Nevis (1651-1800)	Trinidad & Tobago (1751-1800)	British Guiana (1776-1800)
23,480	18,210	13,227	8,742	2,784

Table 4: Estimated Captive Totals to the British West Indies from the Gold Coast, 1626-1800

Jamaica (1651-1800)	Barbados (1626-1800)	Antigua (1676-1800)	Grenada (1751-1800)	St. Kitts (1651-1800)	Montserrat & Nevis (1651-1800)
321,651	133,381	36,033	26,435	23,483	21,497

British Guiana (1776-1800)	St. Vincent (1751-1800)	Other BWI (1626-1800)	Trinidad & Tobago (1751-1800)	Dominica (1751-1800)
13,176	10,907	9,948	8,742	3,843

But the estimates illustrate another fact about England's activities in the Bight of Biafra, compared to the Gold Coast, and the transference of captive individuals to the Chesapeake and Carolinas. 57,825 captive individuals were transferred from the Bight of Biafra to the Chesapeake region between 1651-1775, while 19,017 were taken to the Carolinas and Georgia between 1701-1800. This contrasts with the 15,797 individuals transferred from the Gold Coast to the Chesapeake and 13,160 individuals transferred to the Carolinas and Georgia for the same period. It is also interesting to note the number of captives from the Bight of Biafra that were enslaved by the English but wound up in spaces not owned by the British crown. Hence, a further examination of Anglo-French relations needs to be done to understand how 31,312 captive individuals enslaved by the English wound up in the French Caribbean.

Table 5: Estimated Captive Totals from the Bight of Biafra to non-British colonies, 1626-1800

French Caribbean	Spanish Americas	Danish Caribbean	Dutch Caribbean	Brazil	Europe
31,312	24,367	5,020	4,728	1,080	684

Table 6: Estimated Captive Totals from the Gold Coast to non-British colonies, 1626-1800

French Caribbean	Spanish Americas	Brazil	Dutch Caribbean	Danish Caribbean	Europe
16,956	13,256	1,752	1,457	1,119	297

A query of the (TSTD) combined with narratives of former slaves and traveler's accounts, tell a version of the British enslavement of African girls that go beyond the boundaries of the Gold Coast. This includes the voyages sponsored by the Company of Royal Adventurers, the Royal African Company and independent merchants sailing from the cities of London, Liverpool, and Bristol. The number one area for the enslavement of children on the African coast was the Bight of Benin, followed by the Bight of Biafra, then West Central Africa. European buyers faced the challenge of high prices for captives in the Gold Coast and hence, took advantage of the availability of captive females and lower prices in neighboring markets.[339] Yet, we must be critical of these numbers since there are gaps in the information provided by English captains and merchants and the perception between childhood and adulthood was variable. Depending on the discerning eye of the enslaver, girls became commodifiable, judged for their labor and market value. Thousands of young, adolescent, and teenaged girls were captured in the African interior, traveled to the coast and boarded vessels bound for British colonies. But their captivity in the African hinterland and on the coast would not prepare their young psyches for the complete rupture from all they knew and the terror they would face during the Atlantic crossing.

The Middle Passage Reimagined

"The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of ten million beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new-found Eldorado of

339 Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007), 85.

the West. They descended into Hell …" — W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935)[340]

There She lay on the splintered deck, covered in the funk and filth of crewmen who sought her young body for a minute of pleasurable release. Deep waves assaulted the fast-moving vessel, their salty spray landing on her bare skin causing her flesh to tingle, but not to be cleansed. Through the haze of her pain, She surveyed the frenetic milieu, an array of white and black bodies in all manner of averse, callous intimacies … and there beneath the first sail She saw him, his shadowy presence a stark contrast against the weathered drab canvas, her stomach roiling with fear. Ogbunabali turned his cadaverous face towards her and smiled.[341]

The captain, angered by her lethargy, stormed over to her and pressed down upon her injured knee. Pain, like hot embers stirred underneath a coal pot, shot through her body, followed by a hard blow to her head and vile, spittle diffused curses. Dazed, stars began to dance before her eyes. In a language She could not comprehend, the captain ordered a boy to fasten her arm to a gun tackle and in one swift motion, she was hoisted in the air. The other captive women and girls, and some of the crew, looked on in horror as she was strung up by her other arm, then her injured leg and mercilessly jerked up and down in an attempt to straighten it. In between hoistings the captain beat her, his face disfigured by the will to break her chi, the whip agile in his wrathful fist causing her flesh to split open, her blood mixing with the salty brine on the deck that emptied into the caliginous sea.[342]

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340 W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880,* (New York, The Free Press, 1998), 727.

341 Here I am drawing on Igbo cosmology. Although there are slight differences depending on region the following deities are recognized throughout Igboland. *Chukwu*, is recognized as the supreme being, the creator of all. Under him exist minor deities, responsible for natural and unexplained phenomena. *Ogbunabali* (one who kills at night) is a death deity. His victims are usually criminals and those who have committed unspeakable taboos, including suicide - a constant occurrence amongst captive Africans during the Middle Passage.

342 *Chi,* in Igbo cosmology, is the spirit within each person, one's guiding force, that is descended from the supreme being, *Chukwu*.

After some time, She was let down. Weak and unable to walk, She made her way to the stairs of the hull, partially falling then lying motionless for fear of succumbing. Ogbunabali knelt beside her, his long skeletal fingers caressing her distraught face. He could not claim her. Ekwesu appeared beside him, surveying the shackles that bound the men to each other and the vessel.[343] *Indignation sparked in some of their eyes as the girl, prone and near death, lay in the comfort of darkness, the stench of uncleansed bodies, despair and finality having no effect upon her. Others turned away in hopeless shame and consummate defeat, their chi leaving their heads prone for whatever dread the white man was to inflict. For Ekwesu, there was no bargaining to be had here.*

In the morning the shouting of the captive men brought the crew below deck. She was seizing, her chi and physical body at odds. On the third day, her name was whispered in her ear and she awoke. Her pain had disappeared, and the once turbulent ship seemed to rock as gently as a baby's cradle. She looked about and there, waiting for her was Venus.[344] *They clasped hands and walked to the stern. Ala, looking towards the horizon, patiently waited. Upon seeing them she extended her hands, Venus taking one and She, taking the other.*[345] *Together, the three of them walked off the slaver, the dark waters languidly parting, revealing the aqueous road to íme ala, the underworld.*

This adaptation was inspired by the testimony given by ship surgeon Thomas Dowling who witnessed the heinous murder of an African girl on board the ship *Recovery* in 1791. The slaver left the port of Bristol in April of that year and arrived in New Calabar in June. The

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343 *Ekwesu* is the Igbo deity of war and bargaining. He is also a trickster and often summoned when a situation is more than the people can handle. Often, Ogbunabali can be found by his side.

344 Here the deceased Venus represents a *mmo*, a wandering spirit who did not receive the proper Igbo burial rites. The spirits of children are considered unclean because they did not die a good death. The same is so for those who die at sea.

345 *Ala* is the female earth deity responsible for morality and fertility. It is believed the ancestors, in the the underworld resides in her womb. She also is involved in judging human actions and is in charge of Igbo customs and law. While *Chukwu* is the giver of law, *Ala* is the enforcer. and the two are meant to complement each other in Igbo culture.

unnamed African girl in question was reportedly sold to Kimber already in a pitiful state. However, Dowling asserted he did not have the opportunity to fully examine her before the ship set sail. After three months in the Bight of Biafra, the *Recovery* turned its sails towards the Caribbean Island of Grenada with thirty-five girls and one hundred-sixteen women on board.[346] Stephen Devereaux, a crew member who also witnessed the murder, admitted to Parliament that he "truly believe[d] that punishment was the cause of her death, if it had not been so, … she would have gone to market."[347] The death of another captive girl, "Venus" is casually mentioned.

Image 4: Isaac Cruikshank, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade*, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Michael Graham-Stewart Collection, S. W. Forbes, Publisher. 1792.

346 Transatlantic Slave Trade Database Voyage #18115

347 Library of Congress, "The trial of Captain John Kimber, for the supposed murder of an African girl: at the Admiralty Sessions, before the Hon. Sir James Marriot ... and Sir William Ashurst ... on Thursday, June 7, 1792: of which he was most honourably acquitted, and the two seamen who provided evidence for the prosecution were committed to Newgate to take their trials for wilful and corrupt perjury."

Despite the exhaustive testimonies of Dowling and Devereaux, Captain Kimber was acquitted of all charges. It becomes evident that the trial is not about the death of two African girls, but rather about the preservation of the reputation of a man of some standing in the Bristol merchant community. Saidiya Hartman reminds us that the narratives that exist about the experiences of Africans are not about them, "but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives."[348] Moreover, the archive itself is a product of both racial and gendered biases, as well as imperial assumptions, that center on specific (male) lives that are considered worth documenting. Fault is found with the testimonies of Dowling and Devereaux, not because of inconsistencies, but because of the disdain the two men harbored for the shameless captain. This disdain was assumed to be slanderous towards the captain and hence, the two men were accused and tried for perjury. The death of two African girls aboard the ship *Recovery* is inconsequential, even normalized, when breaking the will of African captives and turning them into subservient slaves for American colonies is considered.

For many groups in West Africa, death is a welcomed friend, accompanying those who have lived long productive lives to the realm of the ancestors, where they continue to interject in the activities of the living. But like the socioeconomic dimensions of burgeoning states in the region during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, death was also altered by the transatlantic slave trade. It swept through slave markets, planting markers where its latest victims eternally slept in mass graves. In the thick bush of the interior, death lurked, picking off those who lagged behind the coffles being led to the coast. In the shadow of the slave ships, infants were unwillingly given to it, and others were discarded without care by Europeans who saw little value in their young bodies, leaving death to gently claim their beloved souls. Meanwhile, captors, some white as ghosts, others, their own countrymen, branded, stripped and clustered various individuals together, rendering African bodies into marketable property. Older captive children could sense death's cold presence as men worked feverishly to bind their small limbs in

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348 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (June 2008), 2

preparation to board the dark ominous vessels anchored offshore. Ship surgeon Ecroyde Claxton recalled,

> One in particular, a girl, when she found that she was sold, clung fast about the neck of her disposer and eagerly embraced him - he did all that laid in his power to make her easy under her situation; but notwithstanding his exertions, accompanied with ours, it was impossible, though a child of about ten or twelve years of age, to give her any comfort, and she continued for three or four days in that situation: indeed all the rest of the cargo, and which she received from the *Garland*, appeared to me more or less afflicted when they found that we had left their country.[349]

When young Akeiso arrived on the coast after being kidnapped from the interior, she and the other captive children were stripped of their precious beads and shells. Once on board the ship, they were permitted to move about, naked and unfettered. But there was never enough to eat and the punishments they received were often violent and frequent. Children were the most vulnerable, often abused while being used as servants or sexual objects by the crew.[350] On each ship packed with human cargo death became a welcome specter that permeated each plank of wood; a constant companion. The children were comforted by death's presence, understanding that those who died "were restored to their people and their country."[351] When we make room for the understanding of Africans and their engagement in communal rituals from birth, we can understand the role of spirituality in their quotidian lives and the acknowledgment of the disruption of African philosophies and cosmologies. Revisioning the torture of an African girl on board a slaver challenges discourses that seek to continually reduce captives to cargo, and inhuman laboring bodies destined for American markets.

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349 Although the *Garland* sailed under the British flag, its principal region of trading in the Americas was the Spanish Caribbean. Ecroyde Claxton, Ship Surgeon. Cameroon, 1788. Sheila Lambert, ed. *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 82, 32-4.

350 Sandra Green, ("Child) Slavery in Africa as Social Death? Reponses Past and Present" in *On Human Bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, John P. Bodel and Walter Scheidel, eds. (John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 197.

351 Florence Hall (Akeiso). Memoir of the Life of Florence Hall, The Powel Family Papers, 1808-1820, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The process of manufacturing slaves for labor in England's American colonies began once a captive was sold either in a hinterland market or on the coast to an English factor. Once on the coast, captives were sorted and branded. Afterwards, some immediately boarded ships, others were situated in canoes that would take them out to waiting vessels. Once the ship's hull was full, it sailed into the deep waters of the Atlantic, where the power dynamic between the captain and his crew would violently play out on the African bodies shackled below the ship, and on the deck. The slave ship, in all its tonnage, was a "combination war machine, mobile prison and factory where the factory production of labor, power and race depended on violence." [352] The manufacturing of captives for America's colonies, turning the African body into commodified flesh, began on the slave ship and was extended to the Caribbean theater as Hilary Beckles suggests.[353] Through "physical, emotional and psychological conditioning," British seamen meticulously shaped the enslaved body. Amid abject violence, separation, alienation and physical death, the question of social death rears its long-debated head. Orlando Patterson posits, if African spirituality allows for the possibility of the dead to continually interact with the living, then how can society relate to the living who are "socially dead?"[354] How did enslaved girls respond to their own social deaths? Patterson explains that the captive existed between the

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352 Marcus Rediker, The Slave Ship: A Human History, (New York: Penguin, 2007) 9. Rediker also discusses the hierarchical divisions of the slave ship that are indicative of British society. This inquiry begs to question could the term "shipmate" be extended to include the relationship between captured Africans and sailors? ... because of their shared experiences of terror, trauma, violence, and discrimination/racism?

353 According to Hilary Beckles, newly arrived Africans went through a process of acclimatization and adaptation called "seasoning." This process generally lasted two to three years and protected newly arrived captives from the "full rigors of plantation life." This was done so that they had time to regain their physical and psychological strength after the harrowing experience of captivity and the Atlantic crossing. It also helped them build immunity to the diseases prevalent in their new environment as well as learn the routines of plantation life. In contrast, planters believed that the successful seasoning of a captive would result in favorable labor outcomes, as well as better health, fertility and happiness among the enslaved. Even more so, enslaved individuals who had endured the seasoning process in the Caribbean were usually in high demand in the northern colonies on the mainland. Hilary McD. Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados*, (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1999) 30-31.

354 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 38, 45.

margins of "community and chaos, life and death, the sacred and the secular." We can surmise that enslaved girls, who often passed through many hands before being sold to Europeans, understood their positionality as a "slave" derived from their own communal experiences. In West Africa, within this scope, their spiritual beliefs often aligned with those who held them in bondage and as socially dead individuals, individuals without kin, they were allowed certain privileges. For example, in the religious order known as Fofie found among the Anlo-Ewe, the removal of an individual from their community did not sever the spiritual connections that linked them to their natal homes and families. Spiritual forces were believed to travel with the enslaved. According to a priest serving the Fofie deity,

> [The] god traveled with the slaves and the slaves came from the north … If you buy a slave from the north, the spirit will enter the house [with the slave] and you must perform rites for the slave. You dig a big hole, and protect the god in this hole. The god comes [in the form of] a leopard and stays in the shrine … [It] has great power; it can call you and you must do whatever it says … [otherwise] it can kill you.[355]

The enslavement of children in Africa did not sever their ties with their natal and spiritual origins, but in Atlantic slavery, this positionality was threatened. Those sold to Europeans were removed from their communities, never to be seen again. As Akeiso relates, she and the children on board the vessel bound for Jamaica understood death's spiritual and comforting role. But the productivity of the ship, the captain and his crew commodified their young flesh, and the power of the market in the Caribbean turned them into saleable units, making it nearly impossible for them to return to their former positions of (communal and kinship) belonging.

Archival sources – traveler's accounts, court records, biographical and autobiographical sketches as well as oral histories illustrate that children were very aware of their own social deaths for, they witnessed the horrors of warfare, captivity, alienation from their families,

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355 Sandra Green, ("Child) Slavery in Africa as Social Death? Reponses Past and Present," 195. See also: Meera Ven Katachalam, *Slavery Memory and Religion in Southeastern Ghana, c.1850-Present*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 135-138.

pawnage, religious sacrifice and other revulsions. However, we cannot broach the subject of child slavery and the experience of the Middle Passage without understanding trauma and looking to discourses centered around child psychology. Trauma and its manifestations are not culturally specific and therefore, an interdisciplinary approach involving the analysis of childhood allows us to deeply engage in the notion of social death; how enslaved girls physically and emotionally reacted to their bonded realities. In Akeiso's case, she and her shipmates began to welcome death because of their enslavement and transference from their natal homes. Equiano, upon arriving on the coast, wished for death once he realized the severity of his bonded situation … and perhaps this traumatic realization led to him (forgetting) not mentioning his younger sister's name.

Chapter 4: Coobah and Phoebe and …

During the long eighteenth century, as the easterlies seasonally increased in velocity off the west coast of Africa, the slack sails of British schooners and schloops, converted "Guineamen," vessels outfitted for carrying captive souls across the dark waters of the vast Atlantic, majestically filled in anticipation for the lengthy two-to-three-month voyage to new world ports. With the specter of death and fear of the unknown haunting them, captive African girls from West Africa arrived in Bridgetown, Saint John, Kingston, and Charleston. Before Kingston there was Port Royal, the once lusty and infamous seaside haven for English and Dutch pirates preying on Spanish galleons. In 1692 Jamaica suffered a cataclysmic earthquake that caused half of the port city to slide into the Caribbean Sea. What the earthquake did not claim, the subsequent tsunami, followed by fevers and disease, did. Overall, about 5,000 people lost their lives to the natural disaster and its tumultuous aftermath. Although administrative and commercial operations moved across the bay to Kingston, attempts were made to rebuild the former bastion of the island. This included new wharves and storehouses to welcome the vessels coming from the west African coast. From 1693-1790, twenty-nine vessels from the Gold Coast, Senegambia, the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra, and West Central Africa, docked in the once popular port city.[356]

When the vessel carrying Akeiso and her shipmates arrived in Port Royal in the mid eighteenth century, the island of Jamaica had been under British rule for at least one hundred years. After the arrival of Columbus in 1493, Spanish colonists began to migrate to the island in 1509, settling in the St. Ann's Bay Area. More settlements began to spring up throughout the island and after some time, St. Jago de la Vega, what we know today as Spanish Town, became the religious, administrative, and commercial center of the island. But the Spanish government paid little attention to the Caribbean colony, relegating it to a base for supplies - food, horses,

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356 Transatlantic Slave Trade Database query https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/u1sjdHM9

weapons and trained military men - to assist in the Spanish expansion in the Americas. Insular tensions would soon rise between church leaders and the Spanish government over the support allocated to the colony. Frequent attacks by marauding English and Dutch pirates only added fuel to the hardships Spanish colonists faced daily. On May 10, 1655, the British fleet, led by Admiral William Penn and General Robert Venables, attacked the marred Spanish settlement. Some Africans enslaved by the Spanish chose to fight on the side of the English, but quickly thought better of it and decided to run. Those who remained were shackled by the British to prevent them from escaping. Facing defeat, the Spanish colonists freed those they held in bondage and fled to Cuba. Some of these recently freed individuals retreated into the thick tropical foothills and into the mountains of St. Catherine and Clarendon, joining maroon communities. Carla Gardina Pestana asserts that the seizure of Jamaica by the British was the first conquest of an existing European colony.[357] It is also interesting to note that the British fleet had on board its vessels several waiting women and children - English colonists ready to settle into the former Spanish colony. Hence, it was always England's intent to colonize Jamaica, forcibly, taking the island away from the Spanish and believing it was their God given right to do so.[358] This divine right also included the enslavement of Africans, specifically girls ages ten and up, to labor on the plantations and pens that dotted the island's lush landscape, as well as in the households of many British planters and merchants.

Except for the narrative of Mary Prince who was enslaved in Bermuda, firsthand accounts by girls and their experience of bondage in the British Caribbean is scant, at times left to the literary

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357 Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica, Oliver Cromwell's Quest for Empire*, Bellknap Press, 2017

358 Alexander Cromwell and his followers believed God wanted the Spanish Empire in America to be "pulled down" and thus devised a plan to dispossess the Spanish of their Caribbean holdings. Jamaica was not the first choice for colonization in England's grand scheme of displacing the Spanish. Planners in England and North America had hoped to colonize a larger island like Cuba or Hispaniola, or Cartagena on the South American mainland. Cromwell even selected Edward Winslow, the former colonial governor of Plymouth Plantation, to serve as governor of the new West Indian colony, however, Winslow died before he could reprise his role. Ibid., 118

imaginings of white creole inhabitants. For example, *Creoleana: Or Social and Domestic Scenes and Incidents in Barbados in Days of Yore*, was written by J.W. Ordeson, and published in 1855. In his work of fiction, Ordeson details the life of Rachel Pringle Polgreen, a mixed-race woman and popular hotelier / brothel owner in Bridgetown during the late 1700s. There is speculation whether Ordeson knew Polgreen, since his father owned the newspaper, the *Barbados Mercury*. But the work of fiction has been widely criticized for its adherence to the British literary tradition that subverts the West Indian experience.[359] Moreover, like British racist and proslavery fiction and nonfiction of the time, Creoleana exhibits the growing sentiment of elite and conservative views to intercept the other voices of post emancipation Caribbean society. Inclusive of British popular literature and culture, laws prohibiting the education of the enslaved resulted in a void in the historical record of slavery by those in bondage, and although some children were educated, mostly the mixed-race children of planters and the Black women they had affairs and agreements with, they left little biographical evidence of their time in servitude or of their freedom. This practice should not be confused with the children begotten by rape against enslaved women. Most often the children of these violent encounters were enslaved like their mothers, adding to the overall value of the planter's estate. In the Caribbean, there was no concerted effort to record the narratives of the formerly enslaved like the Federal Writers Project conducted across the American south from 1936 to 1938.[360] But the quotidian lives of infant, toddler, prepubescent and teenage girls, thousands who were transported from West African shores, while others were born in the extraordinary colonial space of the British West Indies, have always existed in plantation records, statistical data sources, inventories, newspapers, colonial correspondences, court records, and the texts, diaries and journals generated by both male and female writers.[361] These records,

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359 Candace Ward, *Desire and Disorder, Fevers, Fictions and Feelings in English Georgian Culture*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 28-29

360 Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938

Hilary McD. Beckles and Verene Shepherd, "Introduction" in *A Historical Study of Women in*

however, are open for interpretation and do not fully tell us if enslaved girls were loved, how enslaved parents viewed their daughters or how enslaved girls were prepared for the violence of bonded womanhood.[362]

Understanding the shortcomings of a colonial archive that renders African and Afro-Caribbean girls as desired commodities, this chapter seeks to understand the experiences of these captive individuals as they labored in a system that envisioned them as little else. Here I draw on discourses of geography to define the British Caribbean and the colonial South as an extraordinary space where the enslaved, slavery, and the slave trade were integral to the British colonial project. Port Cities throughout the British Caribbean and its sister port cities in the south, like Charleston, represent "demonic grounds" where black female geographies "are underscored by the social production of space;" especially and specifically because the English thought of the Caribbean and the southern colonies on the mainland as one cohesive geographic and commercial expanse.[363] Here the word demonic, aside from its wicked and spiritual connotation, reflects the scientific, "a system that cannot be determined;" a result that is unpredictable. Sylvia Wynter expounds on the notion of the demonic by asking us to think outside "the always non-arbitrary pre-prescribed, which underscores the ways in which subaltern lives are not marginal to regulatory classification systems, but instead [are] integral to them."[364] The enslavement of African and Afro descended girls in the British Caribbean was necessary for the institution of slavery to exist within these temperate, urban and agronomical territories. It is, however, also imperative to comprehend the experiences of black girls on their own terms, opposing the boundaries of race, labor, violence, and bondage in a colonial world that perceived African

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Jamaica, 1655-1844, (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2006), ix

362 Cecily Jones, "Suffer the Little Children: Slavery and its Legacies for Caribbean Children in the Diaspora" *The David Nicholls Memorial Lecture*, 2007. 11

363 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds, Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxv

364 Ibid., xxv

women and their daughters as the fantastical other; sable and saffron Venuses that were racially inferior and lascivious, yet physically and reproductively assiduous.

Within this terrain of gender, labor and terror, a nuanced understanding of bare labor and the turning of young bodies into "slaves," is necessary. Bare labor, as defined by Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, refers to "a life stripped of official access to forms of social life, identity and belonging."[365] The world imagined by British planters and merchants, built on sugar, indigo, coffee, and captives, could only exist through dominance; the dominance of nature, labor, and African bodies attuned to agriculture and specific desired skill sets. The colonial project was fully vested in the social death of African and Afro-Caribbean captives to meet the labor demands required of emerging new world markets. African girls, stripped down to the bare labor their bodies could provide, were valued for industry, void of humanity and contorted into chattel; the possession of planters, merchants, and their progeny, to do as they pleased. Furthermore, the threat of sexual violence and physical abuse, a lingering constant from African coastal European forts and floating slaving factories, and the daily drudgery of plantation and pen work, continued the "soul murder" of African girls. Soul Murder is a condition where the identities of abused children are compromised.[366] The flood of emotions brought on by the violence, trauma, separation, alienation, and indignation of bondage was difficult for some African girls to comprehend and therefore they reacted in kind, resisting to work, engaging in mischievous behavior, running away and at times, causing harm to their own bodies. Emotionally compromised enslaved girls became emotionally compromised bonded women. This condition is

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365 Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649-1849*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 26-27. Dillon expounds upon her usage of bare labor as opposed to Giorgio Agamben's "bare life" which builds on the Roman concept of "homer sacre," an individual who can be murdered without the killer being regarded as a murderer.

366 Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery," *The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University*, (Waco: Markham, Press Fund, 1993), 7-9.

not to be confused with social death but understood as a byproduct of the process of turning captive Africans into subservient slaves.

There is no doubt that this new world of slavery was very different from the one newly arrived Africans, from various ethnic groups and social classes, experienced within their own communities on the continent. It is understood that slavery in a myriad of forms existed in Africa for millennia and that both men and women owned and traded in captives. But within the world of British colonial slavery, patriarchal power dynamics played out across plantations, pens and urban centers of the Caribbean and colonial South. I contend gendered power dynamics are a crucial inroad for comprehending the experiences of African girls in British colonial urban settings. White women enslaved and profited from the labor of enslaved girls in these spaces. On the streets of Bridgetown, Kingston, Basseterre and Charleston, African girls and their counterparts were hired out as seamstresses, laundresses, childcare givers, domestics and prostitutes; catering to colonists, seamen, planters and merchants that lived in and frequented these bustling port cities. In these spaces white women's power over enslaved girls is evident and contributed to the municipal economies that were dependent on gendered bonded labor, while also maintaining social and racial hierarchies that were also prevalent in the English metropole.

Arrivals

In just a matter of months, Akeiso's peaceful existence with her family beside the Great Imo River in the interior of the Bight of Biafra, was abruptly and permanently changed due to her kidnapping and entry into the Transatlantic slave trade. Having just experienced the horror of the Atlantic crossing, it is doubtful that her arrival in Port Royal in the mid-1700s was as joyful as Janet Schaw described when she observed the sale of newly arrived Africans in Basseterre, St. Kitts. She noted,

> They stood up to be looked at with perfect unconcern. The husband was to be divided from the wife, the infant from the mother; but the most perfect indifference ran thro' the

> whole. They were laughing and jumping, making faces at each other, and not caring a single farthing for their fate. This is not however without exception; and it behoves the planter to consider the country from whence he purchases his slaves; as those from one coast are mere brutes and fit only for the labour of the field, while those from another are bad field Negroes, but faithful handy house-servants. There are others who seem entirely formed for the mechanick arts, and these of all others are the most valuable …[367]

The gaze of a privileged Scotswoman whose family was invested in the institution of slavery, and the lucrative advantages it provided, stand in stark contrast to the realities of the enslaved. For when Akeiso arrived in Port Royal, she was made to suffer "a strange language and new master."[368] Akeiso does not offer clarity on her very interesting statement prompting one to ask if she was previously part of the *ohu* caste, enslaved individuals who were absorbed into the Igbo family structure and larger society, or if she passed through many hands, like Equainao's sister and the African abolitionist himself, before being sold into Transatlantic slavery. Maybe she was referring to her current situation as an adult, purchased by one white planter in the parish of St. Ann then owned by another due to British property and inheritance laws. Unfortunately, we do not know and the archive leaves little to no clues, except that there were three enslaved women named Florence listed in the inventory of the Johnston plantation where she resided.[369]

Akeiso was but one of the thousands of girls transported from the Bight of Biafra to Jamaica during the eighteenth century. Around the same time as her arrival in Port Royal, Molia, an Igbo girl around the age of fifteen arrived in Kingston. However, unlike Akeiso, she was not immediately purchased by a planter, and so, Molia's first couple of months in a strange island was spent in an overcrowded slave pen with other captive Africans, some of them Igbo, like herself. Although the slave pen may have offered some semblance of solace - being around one's

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367 Evangeline Walker Andrews, ed. *Journal of a Lady of Quality, Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina and Portugal, in the years 1774 to 1776*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), 128.

368 Florence Hall (Akeiso). "Memoir of the Life of Florence Hall, The Powel Family Papers, 1808-1820." Historical Society of Pennsylvania

369 Powel Family Papers, 1681-1938, Collection 1582, Series V. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

own country folk, hearing a familiar language and singing communal songs, the conditions in the pens were precarious. While housed in the pens, newly arrived captives, as well as those who had been enslaved in the island for some time and were awaiting sale, encountered violence, sickness, disease, starvation and sexual exploitation.[370] Those who dared, took their chances at flight, like an unnamed girl who arrived in Jamaica on an early summer breeze in 1718. Upon disembarkation, she and her shipmates were quickly ushered to the pen of Daniel Plowmen, a planter in the parish of St. Catherine. There was no doubt these newly arrived captives belonged to him for they were branded with his initials, a "D" and "P" on their young breasts, before they left the African coast. Caged like animals, the girl waited and schemed, anticipating the right moment to flee into the thick brush and the mountainous terrain beyond. On July 11, 1718, Plowman placed an ad in the Jamaica Weekly Current. The girl, as well as another, and three men-boys succeeded in their chance at freedom, described only by the brand forcibly burned into their young flesh.[371]

Unlike the unnamed girl decades before her, Molia did not take the chance of fleeing into the unknown. On December 7, 1761, she was purchased by Thomas Thistlewood and taken to Egypt plantation in the parish of Westmoreland where he was the overseer. There she was paired with another enslaved girl named Princess, whose responsibility it was to acclimate the newly arrived captive girl to plantation life.[372] Two weeks later, Molia was toiling in the cane fields, possibly

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370 Throughout Kingston there were public pens and private pens owned by merchants and planters to hold newly arrived captives, as well as captives to be sold. Philip D. Morgan, "Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth Century Jamaica: Vineyard Pen, 1750-1751," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 1, (January 1995). 50

371 Jamaica Weekly Current, July 30, 1718.

372 Thomas Thistlewood Papers DL_11866212, 14 September 1763. It is possible that Princess was also Igbo. To acclimate newly arrived Africans to the rigors of plantation life, they were often paired with individuals from the same ethnic group who had been enslaved on the island for some time and did not pose a threat.

part of the second gang made up of twelve- to sixteen-year-old boys and girls who performed light fieldwork alongside women in the last stage of pregnancy and newly arrived Africans.[373]

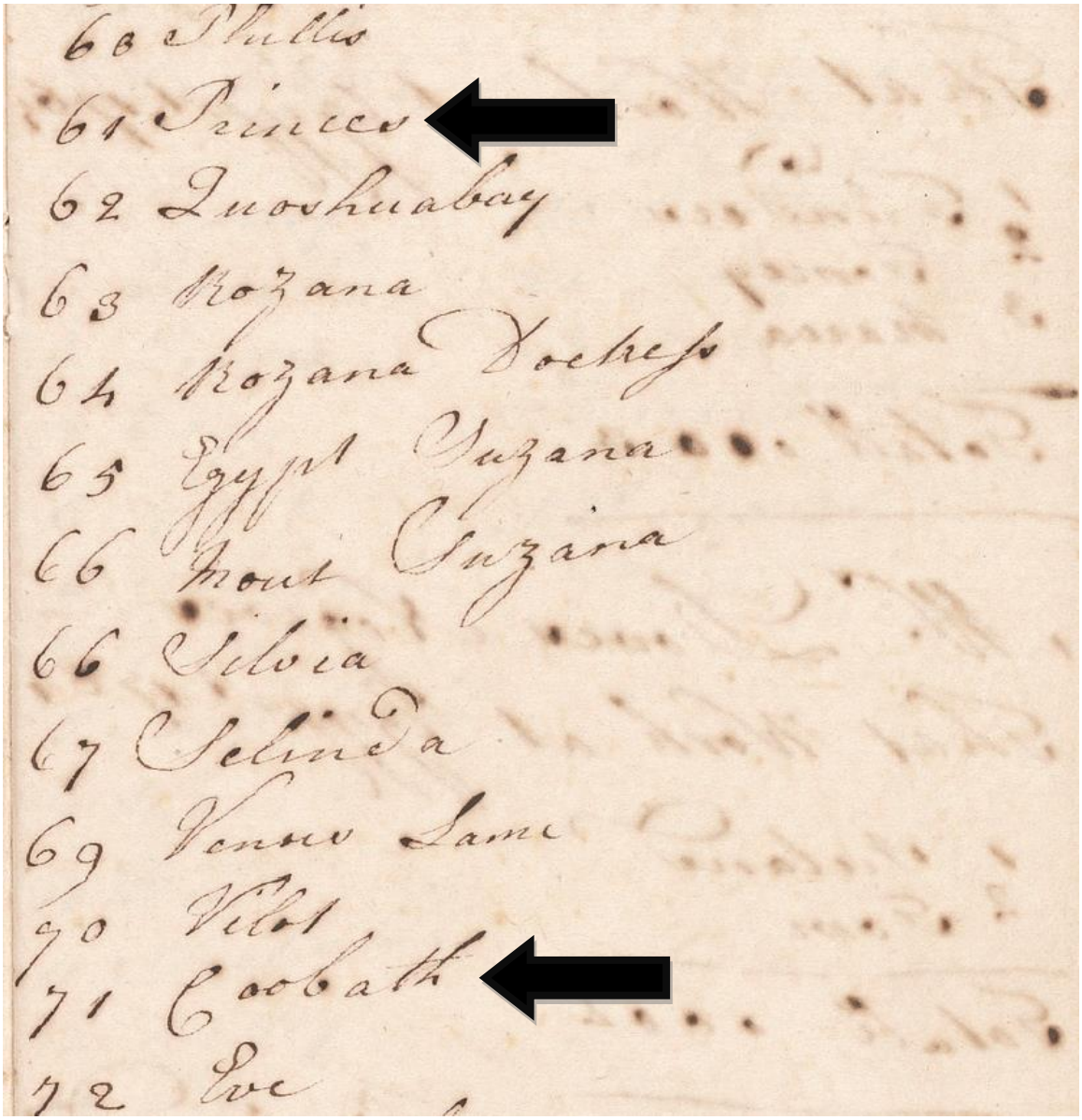

Image 5: Page from Thomas Thistlewood's diary listing enslaved girls and women on the Egypt Plantation. Princess and Coobah (Molia), because of age, were probably on the same gang performing similar duties.

In the British Caribbean, labor on plantations and pens was divided into gangs. The first gang was comprised of men and women, ages sixteen to fifty who performed heavy fieldwork. The

373 Verene Shephard, *Women in Caribbean History*, (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999), 53.

second gang was made up of boys and girls, ages twelve to sixteen who performed light fieldwork while the third gang, children ages five to twelve, were responsible for weeding and clearing the fields of debris. In Barbados, the children's gang also tended to animals while in Trinidad, children as young as four could be found clearing debris. The third gang, also called the "pickney" gang, was often supervised by an older enslaved woman. On the Greencastle estate in Antigua, owned by Colonel Samuel Martin, children ages five to twelve were part of the grass gang and were valued at £20 sterling per head.[374] In her study of enslaved children in the antebellum south, Wilma King contends that enslaved children did not experience childhood but they were aware of their enslaved status.[375] European notions of childhood did not apply to the bonded African child who in the Caribbean, like their colonial and antebellum southern counterparts, were made to labor as soon as they were able. Moreover, girls began to work at an earlier age than boys, often forced into adult labor roles as domestics, seamstresses, laundresses, and childcare givers, before their male counterparts.[376] But the question of awareness leaves room for speculation, especially for younger enslaved girls. During her years as a child domestic enslaved in Bermuda by Mrs. Williams, Mary Prince, exclaims: "[Miss Betsey, Mrs. William's daughter] used to lead me about by the hand, and call me little ni**er. This was the happiest period of my life; for I was too young to understand rightly my condition as a slave, and too thoughtless and full of spirits to look forward to the days of toil and sorrow."[377] As the playmate of young Betsey, it would seem Prince had some semblance of a childhood, albeit short-lived, and in spite of being reminded daily of her bonded status through the carelessly spoken racial epithets of a young, privileged white child.

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374 University of Manchester, BL, Papers, Add. Mss. 41353, Josiah Martin Papers.

375 Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), xx

376 Verene Shephard, *Women in Caribbean History*, 53

377 Mary Prince, "The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave," in *The Classic Slave Narratives*, Henry Louis Gates, ed. (New York: New American Library, 1987), 187.

I Was Stripped … of My Name

Before being forced to labor for an eager enslaver, newly arrived Africans underwent a forced transformation, a British naming rite notated in plantation inventories, merchant account books, and in the case of Thomas Thistlewood, his personal diaries. Akeiso laments, "I was stripped of my name," when she arrived in Jamaica. Before she and Molia were forced to labor on pens and sugar estates, their enslavers sought to complete the mental rupture of their identity by bestowing them with a new name. This action begs to question the significance of names in African societies and how African girls responded to the abrupt changing of their carefully chosen appellations. Also, how did African naming traditions change to accommodate new world realities? Akeiso understood that by being given a new name by her European enslavers, her Igbo identity and any recollection of her homeland was lost. John Mbiti reminds us of the importance of the African child in African societies and the rites of passage ceremonies that mark one's life, linking her to her ancestors and the wider community.[378] For the Igbo, naming a child was one of three birth rites, the first being the cutting of the placenta and the umbilical cord, then a twelve-day seclusion and purification ritual for both mother and child. Afterwards circumcision would be performed on male infants while females were circumcised when they underwent their puberty rites.[379] On the twelfth day the infant is introduced to the community by her parents and grandparents. Therefore, the *Ibn Nwa Afa*, the Igbo naming ceremony and celebration, with its prayers and libations to the ancestors and pantheon of Igbo deities, served as a familial and ancestral bridge between the newborn child, the spiritual world and the wider
Igbo community.[380]

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378 John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, second edition, (Halley Court, Oxford: Heinemann, 1997, 1999, 2006), 24-26

379 Akeiso states she was kidnapped before going through this rite.

380 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 62, Chinwe Nyowe, "An Ethnographic Study of Igbo Naming Ceremony (Ibn Nwa Afa)," *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 6,

Like the Igbo, the Akan groups in the Gold Coast also practiced naming and outdooring ceremonies to welcome and introduce a newborn into the community. The *adinto* took place eight days after an infant was born. This was to see if the child has decided to stay on the earth (*Asase Yaa*) or return to *Asamando* - the realm of the ancestors.[381] On the day of her ceremony, the Akan infant is given her first name, her *kradin* or soul name that is usually based on the Akan week. So, if a child is born on a Sunday, she is given the name Akosua or Esi. Other names are as follows:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Akosua / Esi	Adwoa	Abena	Akua	Yaa	Afia / Afua	Amma

The second name given to an akan child, it's *agyadin* - name from the father, derives from consultations with a spiritual leader or healer, an elder or an ancestor from the father's family. It is akin to the surname utilized in western societies. Children are also given names based on the circumstances of their birth. So, if a child is born during a time of war, she may be named Bedíàko, or if she is seen as a gift from God, especially if born after a long period of time, she may be named Nyamékye.[382] Overall, choosing a name for an infant required careful time and consideration that involved the family, ancestors, spiritual leaders and community, solidifying linkages from an extraordinary past and building cultural bridges for a promising future.

Jerome Handler and Trevor Burnard are among some of the historians who have examined the complexities of naming practices amongst the enslaved in Barbados and Jamaica. Their findings are at odds with previous scholarship that insist the enslaved retained their cultural naming practices from West Africa. They do agree, however, that an enslaved individual may have had several names. Although Akeiso may have been known as Florence to the planter, overseer and mistress of the plantation, in the community of captives, she may have been called

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NO. 10, 2014, 276.

381 Kwasi Konadu, "Adinto: Akan Naming and Outdooring Ceremony," 2010. Afropedea.org

382 Ibid.

Akeiso, retaining her link to her Igbo identity. Nevertheless, enslavers across the British Caribbean and southern mainland relished in the power of renaming those they held in bondage. Enslaved girls were given Anglicized, biblical, classical or location names thus contributing to the process of social death, the complete suppression of their African culture and tradition to produce the subservient, obedient "slave." Girls with carefully chosen ancestral African names like Abena, Chioma, Ermina and Kambili became Sarah, Bette, Venus, and Doll. These names were arbitrary, and at times, ironic, playing off the physical characteristics of the bonded individual. But these names, however, were not equivalent to the stately names English parents bestowed upon their own daughters. One would be hard pressed to find Agatha's, Charlotte's, Elizabeth's and Georgiana's among the names of captive girls / women listed in plantation inventories, merchant's records or in a planter's will. Hence, aside from the power enslavers exhibited in renaming their property, the names given to enslaved girls were specifically chosen to denote their status as a slave, articulated through the language and the dominance of the institution of slavery.

Because of his meticulous journaling, historians have come to understand the life of a Jamaican planter through the words of Thomas Thistlewood. When he purchased Molia, he noted her country of origin, "Eboe" and her country name, "Molia." But rather than call her by her African name, he renamed her "Coobah," a derivative of the Akan day name for Wednesday, Akua. Thistlewood was very aware of the naming customs among Africans, for he noted, "when Negroes are sick, their relations and friends usually gave them some very ugly New Name which they think may deter God Almighty from taking them."[383] Eighteenth century conventional thoughts about the enslaved, their intelligence, their spiritual and cultural practices and European thoughts of supremacy, notwithstanding, the appropriation of African names by planters had less to do with the respect for the African and more to do with the power of arrogation and the language of slavery. By renaming Molia "Coobah," Thistlewood not only proclaimed her

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383 Thomas Thistlewood Papers, 26 June 1751, Monson 31/2; June 23, 1750. Beinecke Library.

propertied status, but he also declared his power over her … and her body, stripping her of her personhood and any form of consent … for nine months after her arrival at Egypt, Thistlewood sexually forced himself upon her.[384]

Aside from sexually violating the bodies of the captive girls he enslaved, Thistlewood was a proponent of multiplying his labor force by biological increase. He was not alone. Colonel Samuel Martin, dubbed the "father of Antigua" by Janet Schaw, insisted on purchasing young Africans, ages twelve to fifteen, to toil on his sugar plantation, Greencastle Estate. Upon his return to the island after spending twenty years in England, Martin found Greencastle in dire straits, mismanaged by individuals charged with running the estate.[385] He vowed to return his childhood home to its former glory, rebuilding its sugar works, adding to the sparse herd of cattle, and increasing the plantation's labor force by purchasing newly arrived African captives. Martin remarked: "By a purchase of twenty-seven young negroes from twelve to fifteen years old, I have now increased ye number to near 270, and must have at least 300 to manure my Planta." Although Martin does not give the ratio of boys to girls that he purchased, his intention was to increase his labor force through the sustained accouchement methods of the captives at Greencastle. During her visit to the sugar estate in 1774, Janet Schaw noted that Martin had not bought a captive in twenty years and that there were "no less than fifty-two wenches" who were presently pregnant.

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384 Thomas Thistlewood Papers DL_11866212, 14 September 1763. Beinecke Library.

385 Samuel Martin was born on the Greencastle Estate in the New Division district of Antigua, located in the Shekerly Hills. At the age of eleven, his father was murdered by the individuals he enslaved during a rebellion on Christmas day in 1701, one of the first recorded uprisings in Antigua's history. Afterwards he was sent to live with relatives in Ireland and was educated in England. After surviving the deaths of his two wives, Frances Yeamanna, the daughter of the former lieutenant governor of Antigua, and Sarah Wyke, the daughter of the former lieutenant governor of Montserrat, and raising his children, Martin returned to settle in Antigua in 1750. Natalie Zacek, *Guide to the microfilm edition of the papers of Samuel Martin,1694/5-1776, relating to Antigua from the collections of the British Library Introduction to the Papers of Samuel Martin.* Wakefield, UK: Microform Academic Publishers. 2010, Introduction to microfilm collection. (British Records Relating to America in Microform). See also David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1985), 185.

In his speech before the House of Commons concerning the eradication of the slave trade in 1791, abolitionist William Wilberforce insisted that once the trade in African captives was abolished, planters would be forced to maintain their labor force through the practice of breeding.[386] There were some in Parliament who believed that ending the slave trade would lead to economic ruin for the British West Indies since the labor force on plantations and pens would be depleted. Hence, a solution was necessary to provide the labor planters needed. The discussion over buying or breeding became a hotly debated issue on the Parliamentary floor, competing for equal attention as abolitionist arguments vied for legislative consideration.[387]

Anticipating the abolition of the trade in captive bodies from the continent, Jamaican planters began to heavily invest in African girls to naturally increase their labor force. As a result, Colleen Vasconcellos suggests, enslaved girlhood suffered on estates across the island.[388] But, long before the abolitionist debates reached Parliament at the close of the eighteenth century, girlhood for enslaved girls, especially for those who labored in the fields and pens in the British Caribbean and colonial South, was in jeopardy. In west Africa, African girls, like their mothers, were commodified, valued for the possibility of their future increase, thus increasing profits for African leaders and middlemen, as well as European captains, traders and planters. The girlhoods Akeiso and Molia experienced in their villages in the Cross-River region of the Bight of Biafra stand in stark contrast to their bonded realities in Jamaica. Glimpses of white girlhood were fleeting and unequal … and the protected and cherished girlhood of white and Creole girls was ironically dependent upon the labor of their Black enslaved peers. Furthermore, planters in the southern

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386 Debate on Mr. Wilberforce's Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. April 1, 1791, in *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*. Volume 29, London, 1817. 275.

387 In 1783, Quakers presented Parliament with the first petition to abolish the slave trade. Petition from London Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends presented to Parliament on 16 June 1783. Volume 17/298-307. *The Library Religious Society of Friends.*

388 Colleen A. Vasconcellos, "From Chattel to 'Breeding Wenches'" in Jennifer Helgren and Colleen A. Vasconcellos, eds. *Girlhood: A Global History*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 326.

colonies had been profiting from the sexual labor and reproduction of enslaved women and girls since the seventeenth century, often selling the infants to planters in the region, while planters in the Caribbean, like Thistlewood and Martin, routinely enforced the sexual exploitation and natural increase of their captives, whether by their own seed or forced liaisons with free and enslaved men.[389]

Phoebe and Franké and Damsel and . . .

The sexual exploits of Thomas Thistlewood, as well as the activities of other planters and merchants have been discussed by historians of the Caribbean, and Jamaica in particular, but I contend that many continue the colonial propensity of blurring the lines of age when it comes to African girls and their Caribbean counterparts. Many of the women Thistlewood took sexual liberties with were aged sixteen and younger. In 1765 the former English overseer purchased ten young captives to labor on his own pen, Breadnut Island, in Westmoreland parish. In addition to two men, two men-boys and two young women, one he named Peggy who was sixteen years old, Thistlewood purchased three women-girls at £52 per head - Phoebe around 12 years of age, Franké aged 13 and Damsel, also aged 13. Their description as women girls meant they had begun to menstruate. Thistlewood was strategic in his choices, noting his preference for buying captives that did not exceed sixteen to eighteen years of age. His penchant for purchasing girls who were biologically able to reproduce suggests Thistlewood was also interested in expanding his labor force through natural increase. So, for Phoebe, Franké and Damsel, their physical labor was just as important as their sexual and reproductive labor, exploited at the enslaver's whim. Moreover, just like with Coobah upon her arrival at Egypt plantation, Thistlewood set about sexually initiating each girl into the world of bondage on Breadnut Island. Despite protestations

389 Ned Sublette and Constance Sublette, The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry. (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2016), 11.

to Thistlewood's sexual advances, three months after her arrival thirteen-year-old Franké had "caught the clap," and sixteen-year-old Peggy, seemed "disordered in her senses."[390]

Peggy was not the only enslaved girl to experience soul murder, the fracturing of her delicate psyche due to constant sexual defilement. Earlier, Thistlewood noted that Coobah also exhibited destructive behavior, constantly running away, stealing food from neighbors, and arguing with other laborers in the field. Whereas Peggy escaped into the soft green spaces of her mind, Coobah's response manifested as outward defiance to her bonded condition and the sexual violence she experienced. Then there was the Congolese girl of about nine or ten years old. Thistlewood purchased her on April 1, 1762, from Jeremiah Meyler, an attorney from Savannah la Mar, and renamed her Sally.[391] Thistlewood intended to hire her out as a seamstress, but she proved to be a poor student. As punishment, she was relegated to work in the fields. After a bout of yaws in 1766, Sally ran away. She was later found in Savannah la Mar and returned. Thistlewood had her beaten, branded, and returned to the fields. Sally ran again and was returned and beaten. Again, she ran. In his journal Thistlewood noted he had sex with Sally thirty-seven times and often chose additional sexual partners for her.

Throughout the British Caribbean and southern colonies enslaved girls fled plantations, pens and homes to gain some control over their disquieting shackled lives. In Jamaica, Coobah and Sally were known to run away often in protest to the conditions they endured under Thomas Thistlewood. In Hanover parish, Eleven-year-old Judith, who had been on the run for three weeks, was believed to be sheltered by enslaved individuals on the Haughton Tower Estate, sugar plantation.[392] Standing at four feet tall, Rachel managed to elude the person who was charged with bringing her back from St. John's Hall Estate, in the parish of St. James. It is not clear if she

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390 Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica*, (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1999), 136, 140.

391 Trevor Burnard, Mastery, Tyranny and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican *World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 218 – 219.

392 Cornwall Chronicle, August 6, 1784, 'Haughton Tower Estate [Jamaica | Hanover]', *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* database, http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/3152

was being harbored by the enslaved community or if she was being held there until she could be returned to her enslaver. Nevertheless, she managed to escape again, this time into the obscurity of Montego Bay.[393] In Barbados, sixteen-year-old Nanny Betsey was well known in Bridgetown for peddling wares for her enslaver, George Agitt. However, Betsey absconded with the proceeds from the sale of goods.[394] In placing his ad for the "sly and artful" Hannah, in Charleston, William Flair resorted to racially charged descriptors, drawing attention to her "remarkable flat nose and thick lips" as identifying traits. This was in addition to the calico dress and white flannel coat that she was last seen wearing.[395] A survey of ads placed for runaway girls reveals that African girls and their American counterparts took their chances fleeing, often aided by other enslaved individuals and running to spaces where they had familial and social connections. Newly arrived African girls also risked flight, often running away with shipmates, individuals from the same ethnic group, or by themselves soon after arrival in a strange place – like the "new" girl "of the Eboe country" who took flight in Trelawny, possibly running with a "man-boy" also from Eboe country, or the girl from Gola country in Liberia, who was renamed Maria in Charleston, who ran away with a boy named Othello, also believed to be Gola.[396]

When running away was not a viable option, girls sought other ways to resist, including work stoppage, interference, and vindictive undertakings. During her time in Saint Vincent, Mrs. Alison Carmichael experienced such trials, while taking it upon herself to teach enslaved girls to sew. She exclaimed, "they disliked it extremely."[397] On one occasion the Scotswoman appointed a fifteen-year-old girl to assist in some needlework and gave her a basket of stockings to mend. In the evening the girl returned the stockings, "nicely folded up." However, when the stockings were

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393 Cornwall Chronicle, August 27, 1784, 'Johns Hall [Jamaica | St James]', Legacies of British Slave Ownership database, http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/2424

394 Barbados Mercury, May 9, 1807

395 South Carolina Weekly Gazette, November 14, 1783

396 Cornwall Chronicle, April 20, 1777, South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, July 15, 1783. Maria was described to be four feet and a half tall while Othello was noted as being five feet tall.

397 Ibid, 151

to be worn, it was discovered that she had cut off all the toes – one portion of the stockings that needed mending. It wasn't that she did not know how to do the work, for she mended the heels of the stockings perfectly.[398] Although it is clear that the girl could perform the sewing skills required of her, she purposely retaliated against the labor, and possibly the verbal abasement, meted out by a demanding, apathetic mistress. Mrs. Carmichael did not think favorably of enslaved girls noting, "…the little girls are far more wicked than the boys: and I am convinced, were every proprietor to produce the list of his good negroes, there would be, in every instance, an amazing majority in favour of males."[399]

Gendered Power Over Enslaved Girls

It is probable that Mrs. Carmichael was not alone in her sentiments, for all over the British Caribbean and the colonial South, white women were enslavers of African and Afro-descended girls. In rural parishes as well as in the urban centers of Charleston, Savannah, Bridgetown and Port Royal, women owned and managed estates as well small business establishments and servicing enterprises. In doing so they affected the lives they kept in bondage; buying, selling, hiring out and depending on black bodies to sustain their elite livelihoods while contributing to the colonial economies that were dependent upon the bondage, commodification, and labor of Africans. But white women did not assume these authoritative positions without the assistance of a male benefactor. Women's positions as property and real estate owners during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was due to the savvy preparation of their husband's or father's last will and testaments aided by British common law. The hot, humid, and diseased environment of the southern low country and Caribbean islands left many white male planters and businessmen at the mercy of death's soul reaping scythe. With the assistance of colonial notaries, white men secured

398 Ibid.

399 Mrs. A. C. Carmichael, Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Colored and Negro *Population of the West Indies*, (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Co., 1833), 11

the futures of their families and invoked the law of *feme sole* in their wills so that their wives and daughters, could assume legal contracts and sign legal documents in their own name, thus allowing their female heirs to own and dispose of property without male consent.[400]

Past scholarship has placed white women in the British Caribbean at the margins of historical relevance when compared to their southern counterparts. While the authoritative power of white women and girls, like Elizabeth Timothy who took over ownership of the *South Carolina Gazette* after the death of her husband, or Eliza Pickney who managed the Wappoo Plantation, seventeen miles outside of Charles Town and insisted on the cultivation of indigo as a cash crop, the economic prowess of their Caribbean counterparts are often erased by masculine narratives caught in a web of patriarchal power and archival laconism.[401] However, new scholarship by historians, like Marisa Fuentes and Christine Walker, are breaking through the web of colonial taciturnity and recovering the efficacious and complex power of white women in the British West Indies.[402]

Nowhere is this power of white women more evident than in the dynamic urban space of Bridgetown, Barbados. By 1748, white women outnumbered white men by seven percent and accounted for the majority of small property owners that owned enslaved individuals.[403]

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400 Inge Dorman, "Masterful Women: Colonial Women Slaveholders in the Urban Low Country," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2005. 386-387.

401 Eliza Lucas Pinckney, Elise Pinckney, and Marvin R. Zahniser. *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

402 Regarding the study of women in the British Caribbean, Barbara Bush recognizes the power of white women often at the violent and dehumanizing expense of African women and their daughters. She also victimizes white and Black womanhood when juxtaposed against white male patriarchal authority. Lucille Matherin Mayer's groundbreaking 1970s dissertation about women in Jamaica, turned into an edited volume by Verene Shepherd and Hilary Beckles, repeats this scope, ignoring the roles of white (and black) women in Jamaican economies that subsisted on the labor performed by African bodies. See: Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in the Caribbean*, 8, 134 Lucille Mayer, "An Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655 to 1844 (PhD, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 1974). For comparison see Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018, and Christine Walker, *Jamaica Ladies: Female Slaveholders and the Creation of Britain's Atlantic Empire*, Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2020

403 Hilary McD. Beckles, "White Women and Slavery in the Caribbean," *History Workshop*, Autumn

Moreover they held more Black women and girls in bondage than they did men, not only due to the power they could exude over other females, but also because women and girls offered more streams of income through their reproductive labor.[404] But the power white women held over Black females could not operate without an acute awareness of race. In her work, *Engendering Whiteness*, Cecily Jones asserts that white women actively participated in the construction of whiteness as they took part in the lucrative institution of slavery in Barbados and South Carolina.[405] By considering white women as a domineering factor in colonial spaces, we can then comprehend their roles in West Indian and southern slave societies that were reliant upon racial and social hierarchies and the law. The widowed wives and privileged daughters of wealthy planters and merchants actively participated in the Caribbean economy as independent negotiators and developed the business acumen to engage in various enterprises like owning taverns and brothels, managing slave rental services, selling enslaved individuals, acting as petty shopkeepers, and huckstering. Under the management and ownership of white women, enslaved girls were employed as prostitutes, nannies, nurses, cooks, laundresses, hucksters, seamstresses, domestics, and general laborers.

Although enslaved girls worked in and were hired out for various positions around Bridgetown, prostitution seems to be the common employ. In his statement before Parliament, British officer, Captain Cook, recounted his time spent in the port city, drawing attention to the enterprise of white women who hired out Black women and girls as sex workers. He expressed, throughout the island it "was a very common practice" for white mistresses to frequently "rent out" their female slaves as prostitutes to sailors.[406] Cook did not object to the practice, but expressed concern when a "negro girl" he was familiar with was severely punished because she

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1993, No. 36, Colonial and Post-Colonial History, 69.

404 Ibid., 70

405 Cecily Jones, *Engendering Whiteness: White Women and Colonialism in Barbados and North Carolina, 1627-1865*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 3-4.

406 Testimony of Evidence of Captain Cook, Parliamentary Papers, 1791, Vol. 34. 202

returned to her mistress without the full wages of her evening liaison.[407] In another testimony, Major Richard Augustus Wyvill recounted his knowledge of a "respectable Creole white lady" who "lets out her negro girls to anyone who will pay her for their persons." Under the guise of "washerwomen," the Creole mistress hired out the women and girls she held in bondage … and grew incensed if they returned home not "in the family way." The bodies of Black girls and women provided multiple streams of capital for white women who actively engaged in the exploitation of bonded labor. It was a vicious cycle. The children begotten by such illicit affairs were also the property of white women to do as they pleased. Elizabeth Fenwick who resided in Barbados at the beginning of the nineteenth century, witnessed the children of enslaved sex workers being treated as pets by the women who owned them.[408] While visiting a wealthy plantation mistress in Antigua, Janet Schaw observed her hostess' interactions with her servant girl. She noticed she "had standing beside her a little mulatto girl not above five years old, whom she retains as a pet. This beauty was dressed out like an infant Sultanna and is a fine contrast to the delicate complexion of her lady."[409] This practice is reminiscent of seventeenth century aristocratic women in England, Scotland and Ireland who had an affinity for African and Indian children. To show off their wealth, they commissioned portraits with these children draped in pearls, opulent fabrics, and other finery. An essential part of these compositions was the play between light and dark; the white, pearlescent skin of the British lady juxtaposed against the dark hued African child who admiringly gazes at her doting patroness. In port cities and on plantations throughout the British West Indies, portraits were not needed to convey the privileged whiteness and power of women over those they enslaved. Once the luster of her pampered pet wore off, she

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407 Ibid.

408 A.F. Fenwick, ed., The Fate of the Fenwicks: Letters to Mary Hays, 1798-1828, 1927. 169. Like Mrs. Carmichael, Elizabeth Fenwick experienced difficulties in managing the females she enslaved, which she detailed in her letters to her friend Mary Hays who lived in England.

409 Evangeline Walker Andrews, ed. *Journal of a Lady of Quality, Being the Narrative of a Journey from* Scotland to the West Indies, 124.

relegated her female property to their rightful position in the fields, domestic service, or specialized labor.

Stripped and bared of their personhood and commodified for what their young bodies could produce, African girls and their American born counterparts, primarily between the ages of ten and fifteen, survived and endured in the extraordinary spaces of the British colonial south and Caribbean. If we are to comprehend the lives of enslaved girls in these spaces, on their own terms, and integral to the British colonial system of bondage, then we must make room to question the gendered traumas of enslavement. This includes the violent severing from the bosom of family, community and home and the European construction of the female slave body; always available and void of consent, overtly sexual and laboriously physical; their work worn hardened bodies socially constructed as the palpably anesthetized and the fantastical other. But enslaved girls survived. They adapted to their new world realities while resisting in their own ways, albeit at times detrimental to their own bodies. They also endured, contributing to the complexities of Caribbean slave societies and the collective resistance against slavery, at times drawing upon the spirit of action that pumped feverishly through their veins and was reminiscent of their traditional African pasts.

Chapter 5: Belinda, Phillis, and an Unnamed Girl

Twelve-year-old Belinda was haunted. At night, her fitful dreams were filled with the horror of men with "faces like the moon" and "who possessed bows and arrows that were like the thunder and lightning of the clouds." In between her bonded duties, she recalled her beloved home on the banks of the Volta River, verdant and fragrant with "mountains covered with spicy forests," and "valleys loaded with the richest fruits." One day during a propitious visit to a sacred grove to honor a benevolent deity, Belinda and her parents were surprised by individuals lying in wait in the thick foliage. While her parents were forcibly restrained, the frightened girl was shackled and quickly carried away. Her parents, who were considered too old, were discarded; suddenly childless, injured, and frantic, their cries shrouded by the foreboding quiet of the sacred space that had been defiled.[410]

On a ship laden with three hundred captives, Belinda endured the Atlantic crossing and arrived in Antigua between 1724 and 1725. The leeward island was settled by British planters from St. Kitts looking to expand the production of sugar. Christopher Codrington arrived in Antigua in 1674 and introduced the latest sugar technology to the island from Barbados. Although Indigenous people were first utilized on sugar plantations, enslaved Africans proved more resilient at withstanding European diseases and the strenuous labor required of them. When

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[410] Adapted from Belinda Sutton's Petition to the Massachusetts General Court, February 14, 1783. Born in the Gold Coast in 1713, Belinda, between the ages of eleven and twelve, was kidnapped and enslaved in Antigua then brought to Massachusetts by Isaac Royall Sr. As the American Revolution swept through New England, Isaac Royall Jr., a loyalist, fled to Nova Scotia with his family, abandoning Belinda. In 1783, at the age of seventy, Belinda filed a petition with the Massachusetts General Court requesting a pension from the Royall estate. She was awarded a pension of fifteen pounds. This feat is viewed as one of the first cases of reparations for slavery in the United States. See: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions; Passed Resolves; Resolves 1787, c.142, SC1/series 228. Massachusetts Archives. Boston, Harvard University, Collection Development Department. Widener Library. HCL, Mass., https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:12208672. Belinda Sutton's 1783 Petition (full text), *Royall House and Slave Quarters*, https://royallhouse.org/belinda-suttons-1783-petition-full-text/

Belinda arrived in Antigua, she joined a host of enslaved individuals working on the Royall plantation in Popeshead, not far from the island's capital of St. John. The estate's owner, Isaac Royall Sr., and his family, enjoyed a favored position as part of the island's planter elite. With familial and commercial connections in Massachusetts, Royall played a significant role in the triangular trade, including procuring captive Africans for prominent colonists like the governor of Massachusetts Bay, Jonathan Belcher. On three occasions Belcher requested captive boys for his own usage.[411] In spite of Royall's success, the island's inhospitable environment would contribute to considerable hardships. In 1725, a drought led to the destruction of crops and water shortages across the island. Social unrest ensued as ships from Guadeloupe and Montserrat offered relief only to the wealthy. Eight years later a destructive hurricane touched down on the island followed by an earthquake and aftershocks. On the Parke plantation, in 1736, not far from the Royall's property, enslaved individuals from the Akan nation gathered and performed the "*ikem* dance," a dance believed to seal a pact of insurrection against the island's white populace.[412] The threat of

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411 After graduating from Harvard College, Johnathan Belcher worked for his father who was successful merchant trading between Europe and the West Indies. As part of his own merchant enterprise, Belcher transported and sold captive Africans. On September 4, 1731, Belcher expressed his gratitude to Royall for sending a captive boy to a Mr. Wellington, although he wished he could have sent more. In his correspondence of January 18, 1732, Belcher thanked Royall again for the boy he previously sent and requested more. The first boy was apprenticed to the governor's coachman, and he was in need of another between the ages of sixteen and twenty years old. In his last letter dated June 12, 1732, Belcher repeated his request for captive boys. In return, Belcher assisted Royall in purchasing Ten Hill Farms, a 500-acre estate in Medford, Ma. Royal Correspondence: September 4, 1731; January 18, 1732.

412 There is a disagreement among scholars about the actual meaning of the performed *ikem* dance by enslaved Africans. According to David Barry Gaspar, it was an Akan royal ritual meant to solidify the support of other enslaved men and women in the planned insurrection against whites in Antigua. Whites on the island had no clue to its meaning and military control was scant. Enslaved people who took part in the dance also swore an oath of secrecy to the plot, solidified by drinking a concoction of rum, herbs, grave dirt and animal's blood and witnessed by an Obeah man. John Thornton, on the other hand, argues that the *ikem*, "shield ceremony" was actually an ennobling ceremony in which Court, the supposed leader of the insurrection, was crowned king. Philip Morgan agrees with Thornton and posits that Antiguan magistrates misinterpreted the performance and obtained evidence of the 1736 insurrection plot through unnecessary torture and wild conjecture built upon fear. See: David Barry Gaspar, "The Antigua Slave Conspiracy of 1736: A Case Study of the Origins of Collective Resistance," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, April 1978, 315-318, John Thornton, "War, the State, and Religious Norms in 'Coromantee'

insurrection spurred the Royall's flight from Antigua. With their household they transported sixty-seven men, women, and children who they held in bondage, including Belinda, and settled in Medford, Massachusetts.[413]

Belinda's captivity was likely orchestrated by her countrymen who were familiar with the lay of the land and sought to interject themselves into the profitable domestic and Atlantic trade in captive bodies. Her enslavement by Isaac Royall and transference to his Massachusetts home is indicative of one way enslaved African girls were introduced into the region. Because of climate and space, New England could not support a large-scale plantation economy, like the Chesapeake and Carolinas, therefore New England colonists did not transport large numbers of captive Africans into the northern colonies. Some African girls arrived in New England as part of full human cargos, others arrived as remnants of voyages that first disembarked in the Caribbean or southern colonies. Although many came from the Gold Coast, Senegambia and Guinea (Sierra Leone) during the eighteenth century, as evidenced by the many advertisements placed by New England merchants in local periodicals, enslaved girls were also acquired from the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra and West Central Africa and brought to New England by a number of means.[414]

Thought: The Ideology of an African American Nation," in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 195, Philip D. Morgan, "Conspiracy Scares," William and Mary Quarterly 59(1) (2002): 165. It is interesting to note that the dance was not a singular occurrence. Kwasi Konadu notes similarities in the predominantly Akan insurrections in New York (1712) and the Danish Island of St. John (1733). A female captive named Breffu was believed to be one of the leaders and was from the Kingdom of Akwamu in the Gold Coast.

413 Isaac Royall Sr. had been sending enslaved individuals to New England since the late 1720's, perhaps in anticipation of his return or to sell, his brother Jacob acting as a middleman in Boston. Nevertheless, fear was indeed a factor initiating the Royall family's expeditious flight from Antigua. Two of their own captives were implicated in the plot to kill whites on the island, Hector, the driver and personal servant to Mr. Royall Sr., who was burned at the stake, and Quaco, a laborer who was sold off to the island of Hispaniola. Alexandra A. Chan, Slavery in the Age of Reason: Archaeology at a New England Farm, (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 54.

414 Some of the first African captives brought to New England were from west central Africa, perhaps remnants from the asiento license held by English traders that supplied enslaved Africans to the

Upon arrival in the West Indies healthy girls were quickly ushered to market and sold to the highest bidder. Those who were too sick or too young to be sold were marked as "refuse." The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) does not reveal the numbers of captives that were deemed so. As vessels made their way to the Americas, ports such as Bridgetown, Kingston, Roseau (Dominica) and Charleston were not just popular entrepôts, they also served as gateways that African captives passed through en-route to British, French and Spanish colonies, thus affecting geopolitical dynamics and trade between European factions.[415] Those considered refuse in the British Caribbean market could be sold in other competing European markets, like Saint Domingue or Curaçao, or brought to the North American mainland for sale in Charleston, New York, Newport or Boston. Still, some girls arrived in the region after they spent some time in the Caribbean. New England colonists preferred their servants "seasoned," having spent time in the West Indies becoming familiar with the English language, customs and labor demands.[416] Boston merchant Groves Hirst, for example, in 1712, advertised the sale of a young girl from Barbados who spoke English well.[417] A boy and a girl, both about fourteen years of age, born in Barbados and spoke "good English," were advertised for sale in 1728 and in 1766, Boston merchants Harris and Aves advertised their newly arrived cargo from Barbados – a "good quantity" of Barbados rum, sugar and port wine, as well as a young girl and four young men, all born in Barbados who endured smallpox in the past. [418, 419]

Spain's American colonies.

415 Gregory E. O' Malley, *Final Passages: The Intercolonial Slave Trade of British America, 1619-1807*, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2014), 8

416 Like their English counterparts, I argue, New England colonists also made "special requests" for child servants when acquiring enslaved individuals for their households.

417 Boston News Letter, (Boston, Massachusetts) No. 447. November 10, 1712: [2].

418 New England Weekly Journal (Boston, Massachusetts) No. LXXIV, August 19, 1728.

419 Boston Gazette, No. 586, June 23, 1766: [4] During the eighteenth century, enslavers preferred captive individuals who already had smallpox which gave them natural immunity, especially since outbreaks crippled both Northern and Southern colonies. Enslaved African mothers in the West Indies continued the centuries old practice of inoculation so that their children would be immune to diseases like smallpox and yaws. European surgeons in the West Indies learned from these enslaved women and began testing smallpox, and inoculation on the enslaved to "build" a more

The plight of a sick African girl, who arrived in Newport, Rhode Island in 1752, warrants closer examination as her young life is held in the balance by a debilitating illness, physical bondage and the language of slavery that deemed her "totally useless," as well as English property laws that labeled her as chattel, subjected to the whims of a clever merchant and disgruntled wig maker.[420] Stripped of her humanness, I contend this African girl, who remains nameless in court documents, is representative of Agamben's homo sacre - a human being that is ritually offered, but whom one can kill without incurring the penalty of murder.[421] In other words, the sick African girl, as well her bonded counterparts, endured a social death that stripped her down to the bare labor she was expected to perform, a life void of identity and belonging and subjected to the bio political colonial mechanisms that controlled her enslaved body.[422] [423] Hortense Spillers, in her seminal essay "Mamas Baby, Papa's Maybe," emphasizes the points or erasure where the enslaved body becomes flesh … where the horrors of slavery - the violent theft and severance from her African homeland, the racialization and sexualization of her young body for European consumption, the commodification of her physical, sexual and reproductive labor and the legislative oppression of her bonded being, are rendered as a "kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh."[424] These physical and psychological markings on her young body render her as a politicized subject, property and inhuman, thus deliberately erasing her personhood from the colonial archive.

"robust slave."

420 Rhode Island State Archives, "Petition regarding the Purchase of an Unsound Negro Girl," June 1755

421 Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus_ Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke University Press, 2014), 33

422 Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama, The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649-1849,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 26-27.

423 Here I am referring to Foucault's theorization of biopolitics and its relation to the colonized subject, where the colonizing force controls the subject hood of the enslaved by enforcing political, economic, and judicial mechanisms as a form of oppression. Schirato, T., Danaher, G., & Jen, W. E. B. B. (2012). *Understanding Foucault: A Critical Introduction.* Allen & Unwin. 90.

424 Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Summer 1987), 67.

Some ten years later another sick, half naked African girl arrived in Boston. Something in the girl's countenance struck Susannah Wheatley, who along with her husband John, were looking for a "young negress" to train as a "faithful domestic."[425] Compared to the previous unnamed African girl, the young girl who arrived in Boston, was named after the vessel she arrived on, the *Phillis,* and endured a markedly different bonded existence, predicated upon religion and the civilizing principles applied to Native American children. And although some may see the education of young Phillis as quite liberal of the Wheatley's, she endured a voyeuristic life that was beneficial for her enslavers and was separated from other enslaved individuals in the Wheatley household and the larger Black community. Although she did not endure the physical labor that other enslaved girls in New England had to perform, the young poetess was stripped down to the (intellectual) bare labor she could perform thus raising the status of the Wheatleys in eighteenth century Boston society while being subjected to the prescriptions of a racialized, enslaved existence.

The Business of Slavery in New England

There is a debate amongst scholars about when the first Africans were brought to New England. In 1624, Samuel Maverick, the son of an Anglican clergyman, arrived in the Massachusetts Bay colony with two enslaved Africans. Some years later while visiting Maverick's home, Englishman John Josselyn noted a troubling incident that occured. An African woman, who was enslaved by his host, was deeply distressed. Not understanding her cries in her own "country language," Josselyn solicited the assistance of Maverick to learn the woman's story. According to Maverick, the woman had been royalty in her country and thought she should be treated as such. However, Maverick "was desirous to have a breed of negroes" and forced her to lay with another enslaved man. This was the cause of the African woman's grief, an anguish

425 Margaret Odell, *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley, a Native African and Slave*, Third Edition, (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 9.

exacerbated by the violation of her body and forced sexual labor to produce progeny that would financially reward her enslaver.[426]

The return of Captain William Pierce to Boston on December 12, 1638, is also given as the date when the first Africans arrived in New England. Pierce, and his ship *Desire*, had ventured to Providence Island off the coast of Venezuela, and the West Indies, with a cargo load of captive Pequot. In return Pierce received "salt, cotton, tobacco and Negroes," then sailed back to New England.[427] The increased numbers of European settlers in the region reduced the Native American population through disease, "just wars" and enslavement. Captives, mostly men, were transported out of New England to Bermuda, Barbados, and Providence Island while captive women and children remained in the colony and were reduced to servitude. In 1637, John Winthrop wrote to the Reverend Hugh Peter noting that "Mr. Endecot and my selfe … have heard of a dividence of women and children in the bay and would bee glad of a share viz. a young woman, or girle and a boy." Peter would continue the correspondence by reviewing the logistics for acquiring more "boyes" to Bermuda. Hence, New Englanders were very aware of the coercive labor practices emerging in the Atlantic world and the profit to be made in the trade of Indigenous and African bodies. Captives from the Pequot War, between 1636 and 1638, forged a path for New Englanders to solidify Atlantic commercial and familial networks that was dependent upon the institution of slavery and ultimately the submission of sub-Sharan Africans from West Africa. Pierce's return in 1638 was one of the first accounts recorded by the governor of the Bay colony that acknowledged enslaved Africans in the region. As a result of the growing enslaved population, Massachusetts passed the Body of Liberties legalizing slavery in the colony in 1641. Twenty years later, some 120-200 enslaved Africans resided in the colony. Many were war captives from the Kongo and sold to English sea captains by African and Luso-African

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426 John Josselyn, *A Relation of Two Voyages to New England, 1638, 1663*. 28-29

427 Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776*, (Martino Fine Books: Eastford, CT. 2017) 17.

middlemen.[428] By 1659 English merchants were acquiring African captives from Cabinda or Soyo at the mouth of the Zaire River, or Luanda, a stronghold for Portuguese trade in west central Africa.[429]

In addition to small scale farming and specialized trades, New England colonists also engaged in the business of slavery. In addition to maritime trades like ship building, sail making and whaling, New Englanders produced and manufactured the products needed to support burgeoning southern and West Indian plantations and estates. In turn, Caribbean produced products like molasses, the by-product of sugar, was shipped to New England and distilled into rum. Barrels of rum were carried to the African coast to trade for captives. Hence, New Englanders became an integral part of the triangular trade between England and its colonies in North America, the West Indies and Africa, thus fusing familial and commercial links and solidifying England's dominance on the Atlantic world stage.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, Rhode Island would emerge as a major force in the business of slavery in New England. One of the first "Guinea Men," vessels specifically outfitted for trade on the African coast, to sail to the African coast from Providence was the *Mary*, owned by James Brown and his brother Obadiah and captained by John Godfrey in 1736.[430] The sloop acquired eighty-three enslaved Africans in the Gold Coast and arrived in the West Indies with sixty-nine souls. As New Englanders became more vested in the slave trade, they arranged for

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428 Catherine Adams and Elizabeth Pleck, *Love of Freedom: Black Women in Colonial and Revolutionary New England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 6-7. In her testimony on April 15, 1669, in Massachusetts court, Hagar (Muntero) Blackmore recalled her central African home, her experience of the Middle Passage and arrival in Barbados before arriving in Massachusetts. Although she identified herself by her Portuguese "Muntero," her New England owner changed her name to Blackmore, a name used by the English to define someone of African descent.

429 Ibid., According to Joseph C. Miller, Africans from West Central Africa accounted for 90% of the Africans transported to the Americas between 1601 and 1650. See: Joseph C. Miller, "Central Africa During the Era of the Slave Trade, c. 1490s-1850s," in *Central African and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora,* ed. Linda M. Heywood, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 67.

430 TSTD Slave Voyage ID. #36050

those considered "refuse," — individuals too sick, too young or too old to be sold in the Caribbean or southern markets — to be transported to New England for sale. In a letter to his brother Obadiah in 1736, James Brown instructed his brother to bring back to Providence the captives he could not sell in Barbados.[431] Eighty-three captive Africans left the African coast on the *Mary*, but only sixty-nine arrived in Barbados. Of the sixty-nine, three captive souls would endure a second voyage to Providence.[432]

Some voyages, however, were not always successful, like that of the *Sally*, financed by Nicholas Brown and Company, the sons of James Brown, and captained by Esek Hopkins. The vessel carrying 17,274 gallons of rum, 1800 bunches of onions, thirty boxes of spermaceti candles, seven swivel guns and small arms, and "40 hand Cufs and 40 Shakels," chains, cutlasses and other securing mechanisms, left for the windward coast of Africa on Sept 11, 1764.[433] Hopkins was advised to trade his cargo for captives, then proceed to Barbados or another American port where he could obtain the best prices for his human cargo. Afterward he was to return to Providence with "four likely young slaves," preferably boys around the age of fifteen for the Brown's personal use.

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431 James Brown, John Carter Brown Woods, Letter Book of James Brown of Providence, Merchant, 1735-1738, *Rhode Island Historical Society*, 1929. xi.

432 TSTD Slave Voyage ID. #36050. Gender and ages are not specified.

433 Account book of the Slave Ship Sally. *John Carter Brown Library Digital Depository*,

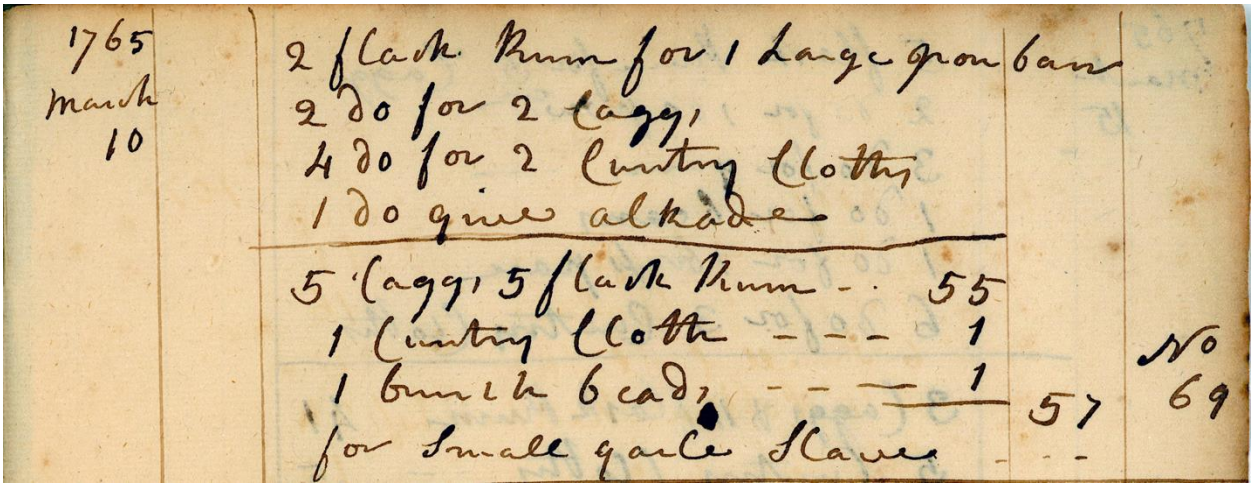

Image 6: March 10, 1765 entry from the account book of the slave ship Sally. In this transaction, rum, country cloth, possibly traded from Sierra Leone and beads, again acquired on the coast, were traded for small girl slaves.

Anchored near the mouth of the Grande River (in present day Guinea-Bissau), Hopkins began to exchange rum for cloth, iron, and beads. Captives were acquired from other British captains, as well as from Afro-Portuguese merchants and local African middlemen. The sea captain also dispatched his crew to Geba, a hinterland trading center with a vibrant slave market. There, ten captives were purchased, shackled, and escorted to the waiting vessel on the coast. Overall, the *Sally* spent nine months on the West African coast. During that time, twenty captives succumbed to various conditions on board the vessel. One woman, the second to die on board according to Hopkins, hung herself between the decks. On the day the *Sally* left for the West Indies, one "woman all Most dead" was left on the shore.[434]

By the time the *Sally* arrived in Antigua, it had endured an insurrection, as well as sixty-eight African deaths. Twenty more Africans died after the ship's arrival. But the Browns were not concerned with the death of the Africans, instead expressing concern for the captain's health and expressed to Hopkins in light of the harrowing Transatlantic ordeal, "… your Self continuing in Helth is so grate Satisfaction to us, that we remain Contented under the heavy loss of our

434 Ibid.

interests."[435] Buoyed by the good wishes of the Brown brothers, Hopkins attempted to sell the emaciated captives in the West Indies, getting £50 for two souls classified as "prime slaves." The others he sold for as little as £5. After the disappointment of the *Sally*, three Brown brothers, Nicholas, Joseph and Moses, did not directly participate in another venture to the African coast, preferring instead to produce or supply goods to merchants looking to make the harrowing voyage. John Brown, however, sponsored four more voyages after the *Sally* in 1769, 1785, 1786 and 1795.[436]

It is God Who Pounds Fufu …[437]

During the era of the Transatlantic slave trade wary parents in the Gold Coast warned their children about the big *n-kodoɔ* - boats with strange white men who spoke an odd language and who feasted on the bones of those they forced on board. In the spring of 1751, the *Marigold*, a vessel originating in Newport, Rhode Island, anchored off the rocky shore of the Gold Coast. Its intention was to acquire African bodies for sale in Barbados. A captive girl and several of her age mates found themselves in a precarious position bound on board the deck of the slaving vessel. Oh, what trick was Anansi, the wily spider, playing on her? What lesson did he wish her to learn?[438] During the voyage she became ill, too sick to disembark in the West Indies and thus, considered refuse. After some time spent in the Caribbean port, the vessel turned sail for Newport, the final destination where her life would be forever changed.

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435 Nicholas Brown and Company to Capt. Esek Hopkins, November 16, 1765. Rhode Island Historical Society

436 "The Slave Ship Sally," *John Carter Brown Library*

437 An Akan proverb that views God as hope for the hopeless.

438 Kwaku Ananse of the Akan nation belongs to the pantheon of African tricksters (Anubis (Egyptian), Ogo Yurugu (Dogon), Legba (Fon), Esu (Yoruba)and Ekwensu (Igbo) to name a few) who can shape shift between human and animal form and who although appears weak, succeeds in besting his more powerful adversaries. See: Lieke van Duin, "Anansi as Classical Hero," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Summer 2007. Trudier Harris, "The Trickster in African American Literature." Freedom's Story, TeacherServe©. National Humanities Center.

The *Marigold* pulled into the port of Newport during the fall of 1751. The vessel, owned by John Banister, a prominent merchant, and captained by Thomas Teakle Taylor, had left Newport for the Gold Coast on May 17, 1751. The ship was laden with various merchandise for trade, including New England rum, "8 kegs of salmon, three bbs mackerel, bread, oars, cheese, cloth, tallow, pork, beef, flour, 8 groz. rings and 47 Negro beeds."[439] The vessel also carried fifty-four pairs of shackles to secure African captives. Although the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) does not offer complete information about the 1751 voyage of the *Marigold*, John Banister's account books offer a meticulous portrait of Banister's and Taylor's activities in West Africa, the Caribbean and Newport. It is curious that the *Marigold's* trip to the Guinea coast was not a solo venture. Taylor was joined by Captain Edward Grey of Tiverton who managed the *Penguin* and shared in some of the *Marigold's* cargo to be traded in the Gold Coast. Once the vessels completed their business on the coast, they both turned sail toward Barbados. According to the database, 149 captive Africans embarked in the Gold Coast but only 126 arrived in the West Indie, for both ships. However, Taylor records that 208 enslaved Africans survived the Atlantic crossing. Hence the number of Africans that actually left the coast and arrived in Barbados is obscured. Furthermore, there is no record of what happened to the missing Africans, that is until Taylor and Grey returned to Newport with one sick African girl on board.

On May 25, 1752, Banister placed an advertisement in the Boston Post-boy for the sale of African men, women, and children, imported directly from the Gold Coast. The sale was to be held at his home in Newport and in the town of Middleton situated on the Connecticut River.[440]

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439 Marion Mathison Desrosiers, *John Banister of Newport: The Life Accounts of a Colonial Merchant*, Jefferson, (McFarland and Company, 2017), 100.

440 Middleton, a thriving port town on the Connecticut River, was home to several prominent merchants involved in the slave trade and other maritime industries.

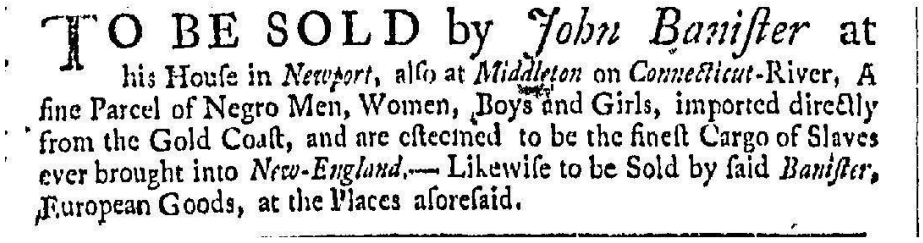
TO BE SOLD by *John Baniſter* at his Houſe in *Newport*, alſo at *Middleton* on *Connecticut*-River, A fine Parcel of Negro Men, Women, Boys and Girls, imported directly from the Gold Coaſt, and are eſteemed to be the fineſt Cargo of Slaves ever brought into *New-England*.— Likewiſe to be Sold by ſaid *Baniſter*, European Goods, at the Places aforeſaid.

Image 7: Advertisement for the sale of enslaved Africans from the Gold Coast by John Banister, a popular Newport merchant. Boston Post Boy, 1752

Jay Coughtry notes that the sale of enslaved Africans by Banister was one of the last public slave auctions to be held in Rhode Island.[441] On June 6, 1763, Thomas Teakle Taylor, along with Newport merchants Samuel and William Vernon, advertised the sale of "extremely fine, healthy and well lim'd Gold Coast slaves" newly arrived on the brig *Royal Charlotte*. Interested parties could view the individuals for sale on board the vessel at Taylor's wharf.[442] But according to Marion Mathison Desrosiers, Banister's auction may not have occurred. Nathaniel Johnson, a stonemason from Connecticut, purchased the entire human lot on credit for £3100: three men (£1350), two man-boys (£900), one young woman (£450) and one woman-girl (£400). Banister charged Johnson an additional £159 for the "expense of selling Negroes in Connecticut."[443] Johnson returned to Banister in June to purchase five additional enslaved individuals: two women (£900), one man (£450), an older man (£400) and one girl (£400), all on credit for £2150. When all was said and done, Johnson was indebted to Banister for £5250, which he finally settled in 1757.

In his case against Banister, David Cummings, a perruquier, wig maker, asserts he purchased a young negro girl, who was perceived to be healthy and sound, on July 15, 1752.[444] Like Johnson before him who purchased a young girl, Cummings also paid Banister £400 for her, thus denoting her healthy constitution and fair market value. It is not clear, however, if

441 Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981) 169.
442 Newport Mercury, June 6, 1763. *America's Historical Papers.*
443 Desrosiers, *John Banister of Newport,* 101.
444 David Cummings v. John Banister, May 16, 1754, *Rhode Island State Archives.*

Cummings purchased the captive girl on credit. Nonetheless, Cummings firmly asserted that Banister knew of her sickly condition, claiming she was afflicted with "joint yaws" and that she was so "distempered" that she was "rendered utterly useless."[445] Cummings sought "to get her cured of said distemper," spending £2000, but to no avail.[446] Because of the nature of Cummings' claim which was tried in court under English property law, several individuals were called to speak on behalf of the plaintiff and the defendant, including Captain Thomas Teakle Taylor who sailed for the African coast some days before.

English Property Law in New England

In 1754, the sick African girl was returned to John Banister. It would seem that by taking possession of her, and seeking medical care for her, that Banister was acknowledging his culpability in selling Cummings a sick child. But Banister maintained his innocence, declaring that the plaintiff's accusations were "insufficient in laws" and therefore, Cummings should receive nothing.[447] Moreover, Banister challenged Cummings' integrity stating that he never described the sick girl and therefore she could have been any young servant living within the Cummings household. Despite twisting the case in his favor, Banister's accusations bring to the fore the enslavement of children, the ambiguity of selling captive individuals and the application of English property law in New England.

Enslaved Africans and their descendants in colonial New England occupied an aberrant duality as property and persons before the law. A. Leon Higginbotham attributes this state to the "peculiar religio-social philosophy of the Puritans" and the practice of African and Native

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445 Petition Regarding the Purchase of an Unsound Negro Girl, June 1755, Rhode Island State Archives.

446 Although Cummings asserts he paid £2000 in medical fees for the sick African girl, his claim is questionable and casts doubt. Especially when compared to Banister and the amount he is seeking as repayment of medical fees, from Cummings.

447 Cummings v Banister 1754, Rhode Island Judiciary Archive

American slavery in the colony.[448] For the most part, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire followed the laws instituted by Massachusetts regarding the ownership of slaves. In 1698, the bay colony passed an act specifying that all "Negro, Indian and Mulatto slaves be reckoned as other personal estate, but their value be determined according to the sound judgement and discretion of the accessors." Hence because of their position as "servants," bonded people of African, Native American, and mixed heritage were placed in the same category as horses and livestock and were taxable.[449] A buyer interested in purchasing a horse, or an enslaved individual, was subjected to the notion of *caveat emptor* – derived from the Latin meaning "let the buyer beware." In essence, the buyer assumed the risk of purchasing a captive individual, even if the captive does not meet the buyer's expectations. Moreover, the buyer has no recourse to receive restitution for the return of "defective" property because they should have carefully examined the property before purchasing. This contrasts with the laws applied in Spanish and French colonies in the Americas whose edicts were based on Roman jurisprudence. The law known as redhibition law, allowed for the buyers of captive individuals to void a sale if the individual was found "defective." Therefore, if an enslaved person was deemed useless, and unable to perform the labor required of them or was considered imperfect, which included both ill physical and mental health, the buyer could then seek retribution and return the enslaved individual to the seller.[450] In the case of John Banister, however, it is clear from his confutation that he was aware of English common law and the practice of *caveat emptor* as an experienced

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448 A. Leon Higginbottham, *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 169.

449 Ibid.

450 According to Judith Kelleher Schafer, redhibition law was one of the most important surviving elements of Roman law that was instituted into the slave codes of antebellum Louisiana. A. Leon Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process. The Colonial Period,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 61-63 and Judith Kelleher Schafer, "Roman Roots of the Louisiana Law of Slavery: Emancipation in American Louisiana, 1803-1857." *Louisiana Law Review*, 56, no.2 (1996): 409-412.

merchant who dealt with the sale of captive bodies. Therefore, he was correct in stating Cummings could not substantiate his claims of compensation by law.

The issue of credit, however, is pertinent to the case of Cummings v. Banister. As the slave trade from Africa increased during the eighteenth century, the methods of payment, specifically credit and other cashless transactions, became more prevalent.[451] In 1732 Parliament passed the *Debt Recovery Act for the More Easy Recovery of Debts in His Majesty's Plantations and Colonies in America,* allowing for the land, horses, chattel and slaves of debtors, in England and its American colonies, to be utilized in the satisfaction of debts.[452] In short, the *Act*, which favored merchants, allowed for the seizure and auction of enslaved individuals to satisfy judicial judgments where debt was a significant factor.[453] English colonists in the West Indies and North America abhorred the *Debt Recovery Act of 1732* because it removed protections to real property and inheritance that increased land ownership, and blurred the lines between real property and chattel property. Furthermore, the *Act* allowed English merchants to utilize English courts when proving their debts and obtaining judgements against debtors in the colonies. The superior court in Newport found in favor of Banister, awarding him £500, to be collected from Cummings. Hence, the *Act* enabled Banister to not only seize the sick African girl as payment of a debt, it also gave him the right to seize any other property - including other enslaved individuals not named in the suit, as repayment. Banister countersued Cummings for the repayment of medical fees for the sick girl in the amount of £258 and £200. Cummings managed to remit payment for £758. Because he was unable to pay Banister the remaining balance of £200, Banister had the wig maker remanded to debtors' prison, to his "complete and utter ruin."[454] Nothing more is mentioned about the unnamed, sick African girl.

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451 Claire Priest, "Creating an American Property Law: Alienability and its Limits in American History," *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 120, No. 2, December 2006, 423.

452 Ibid.

453 Ibid, 424

454 Petition Regarding the Purchase of an Unsound Negro Girl, June 1755, Rhode Island State Archives.

Young Phillis in Boston

Some ten years later in Boston, Captain Peter Gwinn prepared to set sail for Senegambia. The brig, owned by Massachusetts merchant Timothy Fitch, was laden with goods for trade. Carefully outlining his intentions, Fitch advised Gwinn to first stop in Senegal in order to "dispose of all or such part" of his cargo and to only accept cash as payment.[455] Afterwards, he was to meet up with Captain Eannes, who was steering the *Pompey*, a schooner owned by Fitch, to exchange for one hundred-ten "prime slaves."[456] The two men were advised to procure as many boys as possible, as well as a few girls, but not to tarry in Senegal for too long since tensions with the French, who were dominant in trade in the region, were mounting.[457] Once the hull of the brig was full, Gwinn was advised to sail back to the colonies, stopping in Philadelphia, New Jersey or New York where there were no duties on newly arrived African captives. After business was completed in one of these mid-Atlantic ports, Gwinn was to return home to Boston with the Africans that did not sell.

On July 11, 1761, Gwinn steered his vessel into Boston harbor. On board was a six-year-old, sickly girl with her two front teeth missing and bits of carpet poorly covering her nakedness. In this bizarre land, white people, and people who looked like her, rushed about engaged in all manner of activity and spoke a strange language she had yet to grasp. Colonists were aware that the arrival of the vessel meant a new arrival of enslaved Africans to be sold. A simple advertisement in the Boston Gazette on July 13, 1761, confirmed their incertitude. Wealthy

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455 Voyage for Timothy Fitch by Peter Gwinn. Boston. 8th November,1760. (A(5)). *Medford Historical Society*, Slave Trade Letters 1759-1765.

456 Ibid.

457 These tensions were caused by the Seven Years War as Britain sought to claim territory already occupied by the French in North America. But it should be noted that Muslim Africans in the region were also pushing back against the slave trade in the region. See: Rudolph T Ware, "The Book of Chains: Slavery and Revolution in Sengambia, 1770-1890," in *Walking Qu'ran: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge and History in West Africa*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 116-117.

merchant and tailor John Wheatley, and his wife Susanna, headed to the docks to view the new arrival of African captives. Mrs. Wheatley wished to obtain a "young negress, with the view of training her up under her own eye, [so] that she might, by gentle usage, secure herself a faithful domestic in her old age."[458] After examining the other available robust captive women for purchase, Mrs. Wheatley took in the curious countenance of the young girl. She decided upon "the poor, naked child … who was of a slender frame and evidently suffering from [the] change in climate." To commemorate the occasion, the Wheatley's decided to name the young girl after the vessel she arrived on … *Phillis*.

Several reasons lie behind the Wheatley's decision to purchase the young girl from Senegambia, one being to display their wealth since it was evident that the child could not physically perform the duties required of her as a domestic. The other is more sentimental, for some weeks earlier, the Wheatley's observed the ninth anniversary of their daughter Sarah's death.[459] Phillis would have been about the same age as young Sarah Wheatley, who died at the age of seven. This emotional bond explains the psychological connection between the Wheatley's and young Phillis. However, the they still persisted in their ownership and power over the African child. Despite their sentimental reasonings, they bestowed upon her a name that would forever link her to the abrupt severance and alienation from her homeland and her bonded condition in a new world. It was not a name conferred in remembrance of their dearly departed daughter.

Susanna Wheatley, and the Wheatley family needed the young African girl to fill the chasm left by the death of their beloved daughter and sister. The family also displayed their religious benevolence by educating young Phillis, inspired by the African girl's precociousness. Mrs. Wheatley was a passionate Congregationalist who supported the "civilizing" of Native American children through missionary work, education and labor. In his study of Native

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458 Margaret Odell, *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley, a Native African and Slave*, Third Edition, (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 9

459 Vincent Caretta, *Phillis Wheatley, Biography of a Genius in Bondage*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 14.

American children in New England, R. Todd Romero suggests white colonists viewed Indian children as "key to the success of missionary efforts. "and that indentured servitude was a means of civilizing them while also providing a source of child labor.[460] The same can be said for the treatment of enslaved African and African American children in New England. Hence, civilizing Phillis, in spite of her African origins and opposition from those within Boston's elite circle, was a project Susannah Wheatley and her family dedicated themselves to, even having Phillis perform selections of her poetry in front of select guests. According to Margaret Odell, whenever Phillis was invited to the home of "individuals of wealth and distinction," Phillis "always declined the seat offered to her at their board, … requesting that a side table might be laid for her, [and] dined modestly apart from the rest of the company."[461] Odell considers this gesture by Phillis to be "dignified and judicious" since many would have scoffed at dining at the same table with a slave, in spite of her intelligence and acuity with words. Odell tries to provide insight into Phillis' inner thoughts as an enslaved child in Boston's elite society. However, the interiority of young Phillis' life, what she personally felt about her enslaved position, and the occasions where she performed her poetry in front of a biased audience, is vague. She left no written account of her own life. What we do know about her personal feelings is filtered through her poetry, deeply inspired by the religious and classical lessons provided by Susannah Wheatley and her oldest daughter, Mary.

Senegambian and Islamic Origins

Because Phillis Wheatley Peters did not leave a personal memoir, like Equiano we do not know the specifics of her captivity or experience of the Middle Passage. But an understanding of the events in Senegambia and the experience of captivity and enslavement as told by others, can begin to shed a new light on lives obscured by the colonial and abolitionists pen. In the case of

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460 R. Todd Romero, "Colonizing Childhood: Religion, Gender and Indian Children in Southern New England, 1620-1720," in *Children in Colonial America*, ed. James Marten, (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 33.

461 Margaret Odell, *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 15

the poetess, it is possible her young life was influenced by the spread of Islam cutting a path through the Senegambian region beginning in the fifteenth century. By 1647 the French established a trading post at the mouth of the Senegal River affecting centuries of trans-Sharan commerce between nomadic Berbers and the agriculturalists of the Senegal valley. The Dutch, and English would follow, building trading posts along the Senegambian seaboard to meet the demands of European vessels docked for long periods of time, trading and loading commodities and human cargo into their hulls or preparing for the Atlantic crossing. The centralized Wolof (Jolof) states — the Waalo, Kayor, Baol, Sine and Saloum — became merchant intermediaries and directed commerce towards the Atlantic thus affecting traditional labor sources and Saharan economies dependent upon cereals and gum Arabic. Enterprising women known as *signares*, who resided on the Senegambian coast, were especially prolific controlling the trade in African captives from Gorée Island and St. Louis. According to Wolof marital customs, marriage to Europeans allowed *signares* to access trade goods, gold, real estate and captives in the interior of the region.[462]

Incensed by the disruption of the economies of the trans-Saharan trade, Nasir Al Din, ignited by Islamic religious fervor, declared jihad during the second half of the seventeenth century. It was his intention to reclaim the ancient commercial routes in the region, thus steering trade back to the Sahara. The Jolof confederacy began to falter as marabouts began to assume some political power while powerful warlords sought to rule for personal gain. Hence, Islam became a catalyst for change in the region. By the end of the seventeenth century, the region boasted several quasi-independent villages of different ethnic variations including the Fula, Manding, Seer, Soninke, Susu, Joula, Nalu, Bag, Beafada and Wolof.[463] The majority of the population converted to Islam as their only saving grace, placing themselves under the protection of local marabouts so as not

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462 James F. Searing, West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 129.

463 Philip D. Curtin, "Jihad in West Africa: Early Phases and Inter-Relations in Mauritania and Senegal," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 12, No. 1. 1971.

become war captives and sold into slavery. But their conversion did not always guarantee their freedom and safety as Muslim theocracies began to take an active part in the Atlantic trade in African captives. Beginning in 1726, a third religious revolution took hold in Futa Jallon, facilitated by the demand for captives and the Atlantic trade. Ethnic groups resistant to conversion were especially vulnerable. Hence, domestic slavery in the region increased and became a profitable extension of the Transatlantic slave trade. Between 1751 and 1770, it is estimated that 36,600 souls were transported from Senegambia to the Americas. Although these numbers are arbitrary, young Phillis was uniquely and forever affected as the British and French sought to control trade in Senegambia. The British, however, did not acquire a significant number of girls from Senegambia, like they did from the Bight of Biafra and the Bight of Benin, due to the high value placed on females in the matrilineal societies of the region, in addition to religious tensions and conflict with the French stemming from the Seven Years War.[464]

In addition to events happening in Senegambia during the time of young Phillis' captivity, her mannerisms point to an early education influenced by Islam. In her account about the young poetess, Odell mentions young Phillis' penchant for writing on walls, stating, "she soon gave indications of uncommon intelligence, and was frequently seen endeavoring to make letters upon the wall with a piece of chalk or charcoal."[465] Travelers to the Senegambian region have observed the culture of education inspired by Islam. Scottish explorer Mungo Park, in the eighteenth century, observed how parents sent their children to Islamic schools in the region noting, the "small schools in the different towns, where many of the Pagan, as well as Mahomedan children are taught to read the Koran, and instructed in the tenets of the Prophet …"[466] He was impressed by the "docility and submissive deportment of the children," as well as the teaching of the Arabic

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464 G. Ugo Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 1, (Jan. 2001). 49.

465 Margaret Odell, *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 10.

466 Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, (London, 1799), 60.

language among the "Foulahs" in the region.[467] It is possible that young Phillis also attended one of these Islamic schools learning Arabic and practicing her writing on the walls and floor, especially since the education of girls was widely encouraged, being taught by the same teacher who taught males, albeit in separate rooms.[468] Former Muslim educator Lamen Kebe who was enslaved in South Carolina, describes the system of education in Futa Jallon:

> [Kebe] had from fifty-five to fifty-seven pupils in his native town, after he had completed his education, among whom were four or five girls. His scholars, according to the plan pursued in his education, were seated on the floor, each upon a sheep skin, and with small boards held upon one knee, rubbed with a whitish chalk or powder, on which they were made to write with pens made of reeds, and ink which they form with care, of various ingredients. The copy is set by the master by tracing the first words of the Koran with a dry reed, which removes the chalk where it touches. The young pupil follows these marks with ink, which is afterwards rubbed over with more chalk. They are called up three at a time to recite to their master, who takes the board from them, makes them turn their backs to him, and repeat what they were to do the previous day. [469]

John Shields, who not only surmises that Phillis Wheatley may have been Fulani, and connects the Fulani people to the changing political and religious currents in the region, exclaims, "It is provocative to speculate that [young Phillis] may have come to America carrying with her a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic script adapted to the Fulani language, hence in some measure explaining her immediate aptitude shown to the Wheatley's both for writing and for reading."[470] Hence, young Phillis' penchant for learning was a result of early exposure to education, the result of Islam sweeping through the land of her nativity.

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467 Ibid.

468 In 1835, ethnologist, Theodore Dwight Jr., interviewed Lamen Kebe, an enslaved Muslim in South Carolina, who was a former educator in Futa Jallon, made it a point to mention the girls he educated, as well as aunt "who was much more learned than himself and eminent for her superior acquirements and for her skills in teaching." See: Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 24.

469 Theodore Dwight, Jr., "On the Sereculeh Nation, Nigritia: Remarks on the Sereculehs, an African nation accompanied by a Vocabulary of their language." *In American Annals of Education and Instruction, Vol. V*., ed. William C. Woodbridge, (Boston: Willim D. Ticknor, 1835), 453.

470 John Shields, Phillis *Wheatley's Poetics of Liberation,* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 99-103.

Resistance of a Different Kind

Understanding events occurring in Senegambia during the eighteenth century in relation to young Phillis' life casts what she may have experienced because of her captivity and the Atlantic crossing in a different light. Odell's account makes it clear that the African child "[did] not seem to … preserve any remembrance of the place of her nativity, or of her parents, excepting the simple circumstance that her mother poured out water before the sun at his rising," thus raising questions about trauma and it's psychological effects of war and captivity on the captive girl's mind.[471] However, with Islam considered, we know that the pouring of morning libations is indicative of the observance of morning prayers, not an "ancient African custom" as Odell surmises and therefore, it is conceivable that young Phillis was able to retain some of her memories of her homeland.

Also, if young Phillis spoke and understood Arabic, and had no one to communicate with, her silence is understandable, and part of the resilience she exhibited as she made sense of her new bonded reality in Boston. Frantz Fanon explains, "to speak means being able to use a certain syntax possessing the morphology of such and such language…" Thus, newly arrived Africans not only had to master the spoken language of their European and American enslavers, they also had to contend with the hegemony encoded within the prevailing language. Furthermore, the mastery of the language "affords remarkable power."[472] Here, it is pertinent to fathom that "mastery" is defined as not only grasping the rules and principles of language, but also the meanings encoded in the language of the institution of slavery and the myriad ways of expression in which Africans and their descendants in the Americas articulated the trauma, violence and inhumanity of bondage. Young Phillis' precocity allowed her to master the language of her colonial oppressor, a language underwritten by Christianity and race. By the age of fourteen, Phillis was writing her own poetry and performing it in front of Boston's elite. In one

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471 Margaret Odell, *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley,* 12.

472 Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press,1952) 2.

of her first poems, "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitfield, 1770," her prose honoring the English evangelist, reminds Africans and African Americans to accept God into their lives for he redeems all sinners. The Christian teachings young Phillis received from Susannah Wheatley and other New England clergymen, who were inspired by the fervor of the Great Awakening during the 1730s and 1740s, as well as her position as a favored servant in the Wheatley household, aided young Phillis in forging a new identity in a new world, thus becoming the "docile, humble and submissive servant" her owners expected and crafted her to be. But few sources attribute young Phillis' penchant for learning to her early life in Senegambia. Exposure to Islam and education at an early age paved the way for her to make sense of a new Christian world, albeit at the expense of her freedom, intelligence, and the hue of her skin.

Here, I would like to return to Sylvia Wynter's theorization of African lives being integral to regulatory classification systems.[473] The Wheatley's needed young Phillis to boost their perception of wealth and social standing in Boston. But if we view young Phillis on her own terms, we can comprehend how the young African girl needed the Wheatley's to craft an identity, indicative of Susannah Wheatley's instructions, for survival in New England. Young Phillis was not treated like the other servants within the Wheatley household and kept away from other enslaved individuals. Enslaved children tended to avoid the sinewy tendrils of social death and natal alienation by becoming "the trusted aides and confidants of their masters."[474] This "protest phase" coined by psychologists, follows physical and mental defeat and threatened helplessness.[475] Hence Phillis needed the Wheatleys in order to hold onto and rebuild her identity in a world so different from whence she came. It is probable that as she grew older, she became more aware of her position within the Wheatley household that offered her a girlhood incomparable to her enslaved counterparts. Therefore, Phillis resisted her bonded condition

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473 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds, Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, xxv.

474 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 174

475 Sandra E. Greene, "(Child) Slavery in Africa as Social Death," 203

through her intelligence, spiritual insight and poetry, forging an altered identity that subverted Africa and was realized through the civilizing vision of Susannah Wheatley and her family.

The desire for assiduous, African captives to labor in England's colonies in the Americas, regardless of age and gender fueled an Anglo-American economy that rendered the African as property by use of calculated and extreme force, colonizing processes and English legislation adapted to favor the merchant class in the metropole as well as in the West Indies and North America. Captive African girls were particularly affected by the institution of slavery in New England. Some were introduced into the region after some time spent in the West Indies, traveling and settling in New England as part of a larger colonial household or advertised and sold directly to New England colonists desiring young servants who were used to English mores and were immune to smallpox. Others arrived as human cargo, enduring a second voyage due to their classification as refuse because they were not sold in Barbados, Jamaica or Charleston. Either way, they were vulnerable, caught in an entanglement of bare labor and social death because of the labor their young bodies was expected to perform - physical, as in the case of a sick, unnamed African girls from the Gold Coast, or intellectual, as in the case of a young poetess named Phillis from Senegambia. Sadly, the plight of the sick African girl is unknown, leaving more questions than answers for scholars to ponder. And although Phillis Wheatley Peters was eventually manumitted by the Wheatley's in 1773, she was woefully unprepared for life as a free Black woman, an existence that was prescribed by race and its synonymous relationship with labor. After her husband, grocer John Peters, was imprisoned for debt, Phillis worked as a scullery maid. She died in poverty in 1784, her death caused by the illness she suffered from since childhood.

Epilogue

Jane Harrry enjoyed a privileged existence that many mixed-race daughters of white planters did not. Her father, Thomas Hibbert, hailed from an elite Manchester family and made a name for himself in Kingston as a slave trader, enslaver, plantation owner, and in 1756, the speaker of the Jamaica House of Assembly.[476] Upon his death in 1780, he was described as the "most eminent Guinea factor in Kingston."[477] In his will, Hibbert described Jane's mother, Charity, a woman of African descent, as his housekeeper.[478] Aside from Jane, the couple had two other daughters, Margaret and Charlotte, who died as an infant.

After spending their formative years in Kingston, in 1771 the sisters, who were born nine years apart, were sent to England to be educated, living with their father's former business partner, Nathaniel Sprigg. There Jane excelled in art, winning several awards and receiving accolades for her talent. But the death of her sister Margaret at the age of ten in 1775 would turn Jane's world upside down. She sought divine intervention in the teachings of Quakerism, spurred by her friendship with fellow artist Mary Knowles. Sprigg tried to dissuade Jane's theological interests by introducing her to Anglican scholarship that countered Quaker teachings, but to no avail. As a result, Sprigg dismissed Jane from his home. She found refuge with Mary Knowles, and her husband Thomas, and continued her lessons in Quakerism. She also found employment as a governess to the children of the Lloyd household of banking notoriety.

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476 Katie Donington. "Harry [married name Thresher], Jane (1755/6–1784), Quaker and Artist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 6 Oct. 2016.

477 Ibid.

478 According to Daniel Livesay, Charity Harry was part of Jamaica's elite Black society, owning property and enslaved individuals. In her will dated November 13, 1793, she stipulated that all her enslaved laborers would be emancipated upon her death. Hence, because of her lifestyle, she would not have easily departed with the mechanisms that afforded her such an exclusive lifestyle, especially for a woman of color. Daniel Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733-1833,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 181-182, Footnote #48.

In 1780, Thomas Hibbert died, leaving Jane £2000 - the maximum amount a person of color could inherit under Jamaican law.[479] Immediately Jane planned to travel to Jamaica to dispute her father's will, free the enslaved that were willed to her mother and espouse the Quaker religion. Her father's nephew, also named Thomas, did his best to discourage her claim, writing, "[Your father] never claimed the parental relation, for how freely soever you may have used the word 'Father,' you will not find that in speaking of you, he never used the word 'Daughter'."[480] Moreover, the American Revolution made transatlantic travel precarious. Therefore, her plans in Jamaica would not come to fruition at that time.

A year after her father's death, Jane was accepted by the Society of Friends in London. In 1782, she wed Joseph Thresher, a surgeon, and settled into domesticity. Two year later in May, she gave birth to a son named Edwin. However, shortly after his birth Jane fell gravely ill, succumbing to her illness on August 17, 1784. In her obituary published in the Gentleman's Magazine, it is noted that Jane wished for her husband to continue her mission and travel to Jamaica to manumit the enslaved held in bondage by her mother.[481] Although there is evidence of correspondence between Thresher and his mother-in-law in Jamaica, he did not follow through on Jane's dying wish.

Before the Christian inspired publication of Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* in 1787, Jane Harry Thresher, a woman of color from Jamaica, questioned the institution of slavery through the emerging and radical religious lens of Quakerism. She was not alone in her sentiments for Quakers in the English metropole were influenced by the work of Anthony Benezet across the

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479 Ibid.

480 Ibid.

481 In the original copy of her will, Charity Harry gave Joseph Thresher seven hundred pounds to emancipate those she enslaved upon her death, thus honoring her daughter's wishes. However, Joseph Thresher preceded her in death by seven years and the provision was remanded. See: Daniel Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733-1833*, 257.

Atlantic in the fledgling city of Philadelphia, and in 1783, a group of Quakers presented an anti-slavery petition, signed by 534 men, to the newly formed United States Congress.[482] Hence, the roots of abolition had global implications as individuals in England and the fledgling United States fought to end the traffic in African captives. However, the general public was removed from the notion of what slavery was - the violence and horror of what captives experienced so that their labor could be capitalized upon. It would take the intentional murder of one hundred thirty-two captive Africans, in 1791, to catapult the question of slavery, and a call for its end, from the Parliamentary floor into the wider public sphere.

After reaching a capacity of 440 captive souls at Cape Coast Castle and Anomabu in the Gold Coast, the *Zong* set sail for Jamaica in September 1791. Before beginning its transatlantic voyage, the *Zong* stopped at Sao Tomé to fill up on drinking water. As the vessel made its way to the Caribbean, the captain, Luke Collingwood, a former ship surgeon whose expertise was utilized in selecting the choicest captives for market in the West Indies, made grave navigational errors steering the vessel off its intended course. Moreover, sometime during the journey Collingwood fell gravely ill and left the navigation of the ship to Robert Stubbs, a questionable character who sought passage on the *Zong*. Two months later the vessel was in sight of Tobago. Although the ship was running short on drinking water, the decision was made not to stop. Around November 27th or 28th, Jamaica was in sight, but mistaken for Saint Domingue. The Zong continued a westward trajectory taking it three hundred miles away from its intended destination with only four days of drinking water left. Thinking of the sustainability of both crew and human cargo, the crew decided upon the unthinkable - to throw captives overboard. With

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482 The petition builds upon the Germantown Friends' Antislavery Petition of 1688 and was influenced by the new legislation that centered on a plan of gradual emancipation for the enslaved in the state. See: "1688 Petition against Slavery," The Historic 1770 Germantown Mennonite Meetinghouse, http://www.meetinghouse.info/1688-petition-against-slavery.html. For the work of Anthony Benezet see: Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea ... A new impression of the edition of 1788, etc* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968) and David L. Crosby, ed., *The Complete Antislavery Writings of Anthony Benezet, 1754-1783: An Annotated Critical Edition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

sickness and death multiplied during the long voyage, the Zong already suffered the death of four crew and sixty-two Africans. With provisions dwindling, a sick captain and geopolitical tensions plaguing the Caribbean islands, the intentional killing of Africans seemed the logical choice to salvage the crew and remaining human cargo. On November 29th, fifty-four women and children were thrown overboard. Two days later, on December 1st, forty-two men were chosen. Thirty-six more were chosen the next day followed by ten who chose suicide, jumping to their deaths rather than being chosen by the exasperated crew. In total one hundred forty-two captive Africans had been murdered to sustain the crew and remaining captive on board the Zong. On December 22nd, the vessel arrived in Black River, Jamaica. Three days afterward, the Zong's captain, Luke Collingwood, died.

After the remaining captives were sold in Jamaica in January 1782, the owners of the Zong, William Gregson, his two sons John and James, his son in law, George Case, Edward Wilson and James Espinall (known as the Gregson Syndicate), filed an insurance claim "against the loss of cargo," requesting £30 for each captive thrown overboard.[483] Olaudah Equiano, who had been carefully following the case in English newspapers, brought the suit to the attention of abolitionist Granville Sharp, who was influential in the case of James Somerset ten years earlier. Lord Mansfield, who ruled in the Somerset case, was also called to oversee the case of the Zong. The two men approached the issue of slavery from completely opposing positions. Sharp was invested in the individual rights of each captive whereas Mansfield had the merchant's interests in mind. On June 22, 1783, Mansfield noted that the intentional massacre of one hundred forty-two captive Africans "was the same as if horses had been thrown overboard."[484] Therefore, the English jury "rendered a verdict wholly favorable" to the Gregson syndicate for the loss of

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483 David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, (London: Macmillan, 2016), chap.6. ibooks

484 James Walviin, *The Zong: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery*, chap.8, ibooks

individual captives at £30 each. Ottobah Cugoano, incensed with the verdict, exclaimed that the Liverpool slave traders were "inhuman connivers of robbery, slavery, murder and fraud."[485]

The massacre of Africans on board the Zong laid bare the horrors of slavery to the English public and contributed to Parliamentary debates about the slave trade from Africa. William Dolben, a devout abolitionist, led a group of his peers on a tour of a slave ship docked in the port of London. What they found caused such abhorrence, the group vowed to work diligently for reforms of the slave trade and ultimately its end. The Dolben Act / The Slave Trade Act of 1788, instituted by Parliament in July of that year, limited the number of enslaved Africans that a British ship could transport across the Atlantic based on a ship's tonnage. To illustrate this, an engraving of the slave ship *Brookes* was published by the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Provisions to the Act were made between 1789 and 1799.

[485] Ibid.

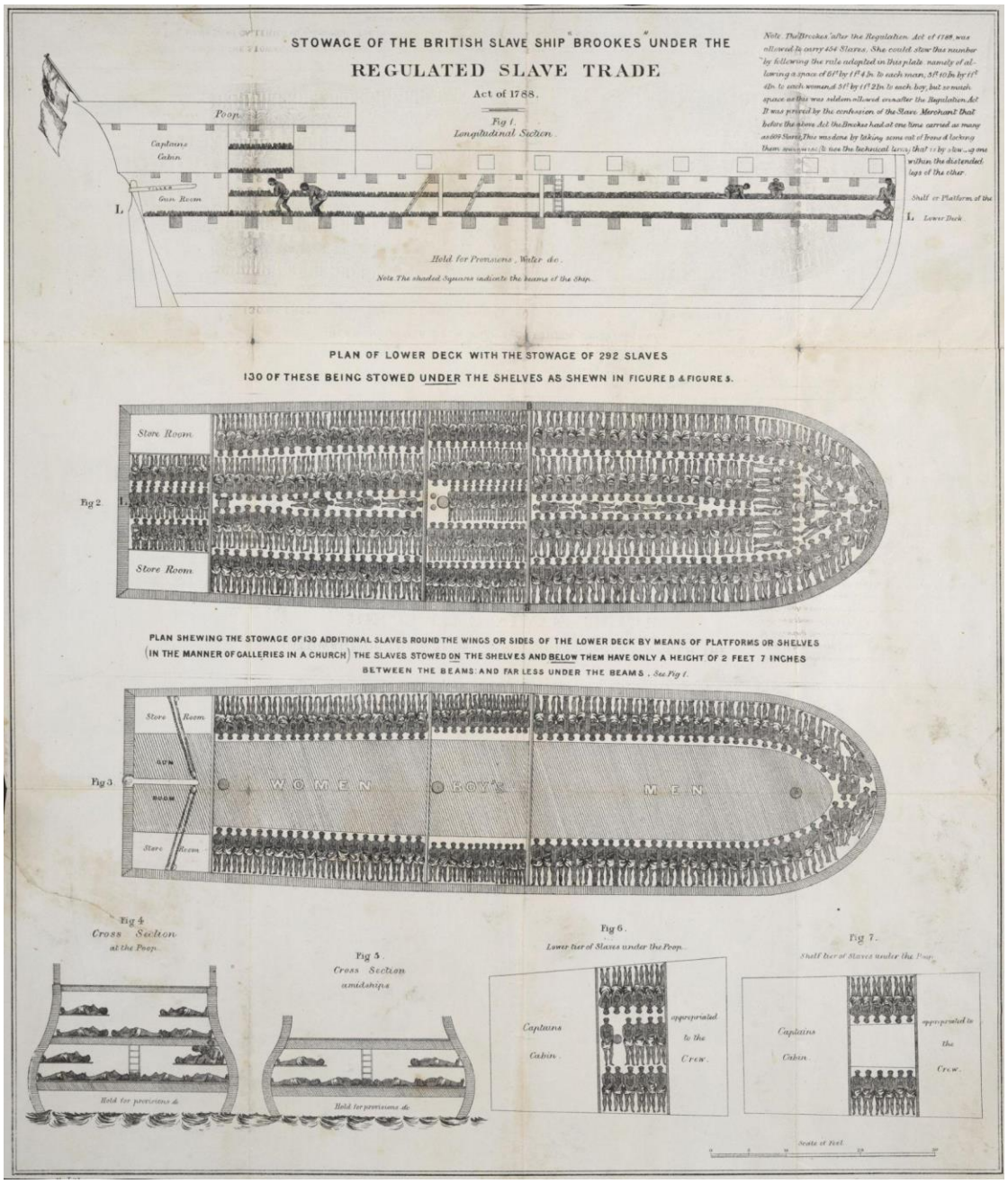

Image 8: Stowage of the British slave ship "Brookes" under the Regulated Slave Trade Act of 1788, Library of Congress.[486]

486 While commissioned, the *Brookes* made eleven voyages between Liverpool, the African coast and the West Indies. Printed Ephemera Collection Dlc. Stowage of the British slave ship "Brookes" under the Regulated Slave Trade Act of. Liverpool, British Great Britain, 1788. [N. P., ?] Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/98504459/.

With the trial of the Zong massacre fresh in the minds of the English public, the publication of Olaudah Equiano's autobiography detailing his capture, enslavement and subsequent freedom in 1789, added to the growing rhetoric that supported the end of the slave trade from Africa. The popular memoir laid bare the realities of an enslaved African child during the eighteenth century and was reprinted nine times before Equiano's untimely passing in 1797. Nevertheless, between 1791 and 1800 some 1340 slaving voyages embarked from British ports and transported an estimated 400,000 captive Africans to the British Americas.

Founding member of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Thomas Clarkson, and William Wilberforce, a member of Parliament, continued to work tirelessly for the abolitionist cause. As Clarkson toured throughout Britain speaking out against the abominable traffic in African bodies, William Wilberforce worked within Parliament, debating against those who saw no benefit in ending the slave trade from Africa. For instance, Robert Peele, representing his firm Peel, Yateses, Halliwell and Co., presented a petition to the House of Lords on May 13, 1806. Peel and his associates saw the abolition of the slave trade as a threat to the cotton industry, and by extension, to the town of Manchester, the burgeoning center of the cotton industry in England.[487] But the opposition persisted with Lord Grenville exclaiming that the slave trade was "contrary to the principles of justice, humanity and sound policy." Charles Fox, Grenville's foreign secretary led an impassioned campaign in the House of Commons for the abolishment of the slave trade in England's colonies. Afterwards when the bill was voted on, it passed with an astounding 114 to 15.[488] In the House of Lords, the bill passed 41 votes to 20.[489] On March 25, 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was entered into the statute books.

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487 "Petition from the Manufacturers and Merchants of Manchester against the Foreign Slave Trade Abolition Bill," Uk parliament, https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/tradeindustry/slavetrade/ from-the-parliamentary-collections/the-british-slave-trade/petition-against-the-foreign-slave-trade-abolition-bill-page-1/

488 "Abolition of the Slave Trade," The National Archives, https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/ blackhistory/rights/abolition.htm

489 Ibid.

Mar'gru, Kag'ne and Te'me

The abolition of the slave trade from Africa in 1807, by the British, and 1808 by the United States, did not guarantee a life free from bondage for African girls, for freedom was perilous on the West African coast in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Frightened and separated from their families, Mar'gru (aged 12), Kag'ne (aged ten) and Te'me (aged nine), sat in the baracoons in Lomboko, on the Sierra Leone coast, awaiting the ships that would carry them to the Americas. Despite the policing of the African coast by the Royal Navy's African Squadron, a robust, illicit trade in captive bodies continued in the Sierra Leonean hinterland. Military officials at Cape Coast Castle reported seeing no fewer than thirty slaving vessels off the coast between December 1817 and April 1818.[490] James Lucas Yeo, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy who arrived in Sierra Leone in 1815, expressed to J. W. Cooper that he : "… found the trade almost as active in the neighborhood of our forts as at any time of the slave trade and before my arrival, rows of poor wretches in chains were to be seen in the very streets of our town of Cape Coast."[491] Officials at the fort also reported that the Dutch continued to be involved in the slave trade, supplying traders with canoes and water and allowing trade to operate in plain sight.[492] In 1817, the British signed a treaty with the Asante recognizing their sovereignty over territories that belonged to other groups, like the Fante. But the British could not stem the tide of the trade in captive Africans in the Gold Coast that was controlled by the large Akan subgroup. Hence, in the wake of the eighteenth century, the lives of African girls remained uncertain, subjected to captivity and enslavement in Brazil, Cuba, and the southern United States.

Pawnage was one of the most common ways girls entered into transatlantic slavery. Females in West African societies were often offered as security for debt repayment.[493] Coming

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490 T.70/36: A.G. Nicolls to the African Committee. April 27, 1818

491 T.70/1604/1: James Lucas Yeo to J.W. Cooper. March 12, 1818

492 T.70/36: John Hope Small to the African Committee, March 5, 1817

493 Benjamin N. Lawrance, *Amistad's Orphans: An Atlantic Story of Children, Slavery and Smuggling*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 38.

from large families, Mar'gru and Kag'ne were both pawned by their fathers. It is not known if they were placed in debt-pawnship because of environmental factors resulting in food scarcity, drought, and poverty, or for credit to acquire luxury goods like jewelry and clothing. Because the dept was not repaid, both girls were sold into slavery in the hinterland then taken to the coast. Te'me was also from the hinterland. There, she lived with her mother, older brother and older sister. One night, "a party of men … broke into her mother's house and made them prisoners." The family was then separated and sold into slavery.[494] The three girls wound up in the barracoons of Pedro Blanco, a Spanish planter from Cuba turned slave trader. After a month spent in the coastal slave factory, the bodies of the girls were inspected for sale. Afterwards, they boarded the specially outfitted vessels that would carry them to Havana.

The fast-moving vessels, some manufactured in New England and sailing under the Spanish flag, easily evaded the British ships on the west African coast. [495] In 1839 Mar'gru, Ka'gne and Te'me arrived in Cuba, and again were placed in barracoons to await sale. Plantation owners Jose Ruiz and Pedro Montes arrived in the bustling port city looking to purchase captives for their sugar plantation in Puerto Príncipe. The Spaniards carefully selected men, women and children, including Mar'gru, Ka'gne and Te'me, for labor; fifty-three captive Africans in total. The newly purchased captives boarded the *Amistad*, for the trip southward around the island. But an insurrection at sea, and the deception of Ruiz and Montes steered the vessel into the hands of the United States Navy. When the three African girls disembarked from the seized schooner in Hartford, Connecticut on August 26, 1839, they had no idea that they would be thrust onto the world stage in a court case that would rock the US government and its stance on slavery.

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494 Ibid., 100

495 T.70/1604/1: John Hope Smith to the African Committee. June 15, 1818. After the American Revolution New England merchants turned their sights to the growing sugar industry in Cuba, facilitated by planters fleeing the Saint Domingue Revolution. Many newly built and outfitted American made vessels began sailing under the guise of Portuguese or Spanish flags. For example, in 1794, a joint venture between Massachusetts and Rhode Island merchants, financed the voyage of the *Ascension*, to Mozambique, thus opening a new market for African captives, traded by Portuguese, Cuban, Luso-African and African merchants. Fifty percent of the captive Africans acquired were children, the numbers split evenly between girls and boys. Women only accounted for ten percent of captives. See: TSTDB #36590.

Image 7: Marqu (Mar'gru), Sketch by William H. Townsend, 1840.
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University: GEN MSS 335

In the case, the United States v. The Amistad, Justice Joseph Story ruled that the captives of the *Amistad* were indeed free and would be able to return to Africa.[496] The girls were moved to Farmington, Connecticut where they attended school and church in preparation for their return

496 The United States, Appellants v. The Libellant and claimants of the Schooner Amistad, her Tackle, apparel, and Furniture, together with her cargo and the Africans mentioned and described in the several libels and claims, appellees. 40 U.S. 518

home. In 1842, Mar'gru, Kag'ne and Te'me, along with several missionaries, returned home to Sierra Leone. The story of their captivity, trial in the United States and return to West Africa is indeed extraordinary. If the vessels they were transported to Havana in were first intercepted by the British Navy, they would have been resettled in Free Town, a British colony on the coast. The colony was first settled in 1787 by formerly enslaved individuals from London, with support from the Committee for the Relief of the Poor, an organization dedicated to the abolition of slavery and whose members included Olaudah Equiano and Ottabah Cugoano.[497] African Americans who fought on the side of the British during the American Revolution, along with manumitted Afro-Caribbeans, Southeast Asians, Black Londoners and white artisans made up the four hundred and fifty-nine hopeful individuals who settled on land purchased from the Temne Kingdom.[498] But disease, conflicts with the French and Spanish, as well as a change in Temne chieftaincy resulted in the death of many of the settlers and spurred tensions with the British resulting in the destruction of the settlement. Only forty-six original settlers remained. Alexander Falconbridge arrived in Sierra Leone in 1791 with intentions of smoothing tensions with the Temne and resettling the survivors in Cline Town near Fourah Bay. However, some moved to Bunce Island, an agricultural region where making a living would be easier, and where the business of slavery prevailed.[499]

Meanwhile, in Nova Scotia, Thomas Peters, a Black loyalist from North Carolina, and others were growing weary of the harsh weather and the racial discrimination they encountered from French settlers and British loyalists who also resettled on the land designated by the crown.[500] During the American Revolution, Peters and other enslaved individuals throughout the

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497 Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 18.

498 Ibid.

499 Ibid., 19.

500 Peters, a Yoruba from the Egba clan, was born in the Bight of Biafra and enslaved in North Carolina. See: Redmond Shannon, "Saint John historian illuminates story of Thomas Peters, prominent black loyalist" April 13, 2016. New Brunswick: CBC News. James W. St G. Walker,

rebelling colonies answered the call of Lord Dunmore to fight on the side of the British in exchange for their freedom. In 1791, Peters traveled to London to air the grievances of the Black settlers to the government and learned of the plans for the settlement in West Africa. The next year, some one thousand Blacks from Nova Scotia, boarded fifteen ships bound for Sierra Leone. When they arrived, they found the former settlement abandoned and overgrown, left to the mercy of the West African jungle. The eager settlers set about clearing the land and building new homes. Once completed, the settlement was christened Free Town. However, their euphoria was short lived due to the racial and disparaging treatment settlers experienced at the hands of the British governor. In a petition written to the Sierra Leone Company in 1793, the settlers also expressed their disappointment at not receiving the land promised to them by company officials. Seven years later, the settlers took matters into their own hands. To quell the conflict, the British relied on the assistance of five hundred newly arrived Jamaican Maroons. For their efforts, they were granted land, which later became known as Maroon Town.[501]

The British gained control of Freetown from the Sierra Leone Company in 1808 and made it a crown colony. Now the capital of British West Africa, the urban center also served as the base for the Royal Navy's West African Squadron, as well as the location for England's Mixed Commission Courts. These courts were established by the British, in conjunction with Dutch, Spanish or Portuguese representation, because of brokered treaties in 1817 and 1818 after the Napoleonic Wars. Once a vessel was seized by the British, ships were steered to Freetown for condemnation.[502] The captives were brought ashore and cared for by the crown for one year. At the end of one year, an individual was left to fend for themselves, unless they volunteered to be sent to the British West Indies under the guise of apprenticed labor.[503] Through legitimate free

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"PETERS, THOMAS," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 4, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003.

501 Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, 19

502 Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Routledge, 2012) 16

503 Ibid.

trade, local Africans in Freetown stopped engaging in the trade of captive individuals. However, Freetown could not absorb the large numbers of children liberated from seized vessels.[504] This created a perilous existence for girls and boys, in the coastal city, who could be abducted and resold at any time.

The nineteenth century would see an increase in the number of African children enslaved and transported to Brazil, Cuba, and the United States. In the case of the latter two, I contend this increase was due to the declaration of Haiti as a free Black republic where slavery ceased to exist. Plantation owners fleeing the fires of Cap Français in 1791 fled to Cuba, sparking the sugar industry there and the demand for labor. In the United States, the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the signing of the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo in 1848 tripled the size of the country, adding slave states below the Mason-Dixon line and facilitating the growth of cotton, a crop that would surpass sugar in the South. Because children were cheaper to transport across the Atlantic and care for, the illicit trade in their young bodies continued to flourish well into the antebellum era.

In the British West Indies, the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 was passed three days before the death of William Wilberforce on July 29, 1833, one of London's staunchest proponents against slavery. In 1791, Wilberforce expressed his fears about the end of the slave trade from Africa, noting that planters would turn to breeding their captives in order to ensure a viable labor force for their plantations and pens. The anticipation of the abolition of slavery by the British resulted in an increase in the number of enslaved African girls forcibly transported to the British islands. But the practice of breeding existed for some time in the Caribbean and American South. Absentee owners expected the managers of their West Indian properties to keep the enslaved numbers up. Therefore, any practice of breeding was blamed on the manager, and not the plantation owner outright. Nevertheless, the Act became enforceable on August 1, 1834. But slavery for individuals over the age of six occurred in stages due to the system of apprenticeship that was designed to prepare the enslaved population for freedom while ensuring a labor force for

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504 Benjamin N. Lawrence, *Amistad's Orphans*, 36

enslavers. Hence the last African girl, who arrived in the British West Indies before 1807, would not realize full emancipation until after 1840.

Like many African families who lost their beloved daughters to the slave trade, Equiano never saw his younger sister again. His plea for her deliverance from the horrors of transatlantic slavery, resonated throughout the African continent and the British colonies as thousands of African girls were forced into domestic and overseas bondage from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. With this insurmountable burden of separation and loss, Equiano lived out the rest of his days in London fighting for the end of slavery, providing relief for the poor and supporting resettlement efforts in Sierra Leone. In 1792, he married Susanna Cullen, a Scottish woman, and welcomed two daughters, Anna Maria, born in 1793 and Joanna, born in 1795. Sadly, in 1796 after a long illness, Susannah died. The next year, on March 31st, after a life spent fighting the shackles of slavery, Equiano passed away at the age of fifty-two. He never did see his vision of abolition realized and his final resting place is lost to urbanization and time.[505] However, his memoir and the memory of his sister live on, exemplified in the lives and resiliency of African girls whose experiences pierce through the veil of time and the conspicuous suppression of their lives by the colonial archive.

505 Six months later, his oldest daughter also succumbed at the age of four, possibly from measles.

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