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MORE THAN OBJECTS: UNDERSTANDING FEMALE SLAVES IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

By

Phoebe Downes

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Facility in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts.

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Abstract

More Than Objects: Understanding Female Slaves in the Early Modern Period

By

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This thesis will focus on representations of African women in the British colony of Barbados in the early modern era, using travelers' accounts, planters' records and the writings of abolition-minded reformers. The topic is significant because most scholars have focused on British colonial life during the nineteenth century, examining the planter class or the region's colonial commodities.

The period from 1600 to 1700 was an era of beginnings in the British colonial world, with England establishing its first Caribbean colonies and experimenting with different economic strategies to gain wealth. This period was also significant due to the emergence of slavery in the emerging empire. Hundreds of Africans were shipped to the West Indies and subjected to harsh labor conditions for life. Out of this group emerged the female slaves, forced to become expendable properties. Their story is similar to enslaved African males, but there is little scholarship on their experiences during this period. One reason for this historiographical deficiency is that female slaves lacked primary sources. This thesis tries to find these women's voices by examining European sources. It will attempt to understand contemporary Europeans' perception of female slaves, in order to gain an insight into their lives.

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Introduction

How do we analyze a social group that lacks narratives and firsthand accounts? Often this social group is ignored or generalized in historical research. My thesis focuses on female slaves, a social group in the early modern period that is often ignored and generalized by scholars. Female slaves in Barbados during the 1600s and 1700s were essential to the production of sugar and the continuation of labor. Yet they lacked firsthand accounts to understand their role and contributions fully in Barbados. I argue that female slaves can be understood through different perspectives in the early modern period. These perspectives provide insight into their daily lives and struggles as slaves in Barbados in the 1600s and 1700s. Through these perspectives, scholars can learn how female slaves responded to various situations and how they made choices. Though they were enslaved, female slaves had a form of agency because they were able to make decisions in their daily lives.

Though it is not easy to research female slaves, there are still methods scholars can use to understand their experiences. One method is to use other narratives and accounts to describe and explain the experiences of female slaves, essentially researching how other social groups viewed them. This thesis follows this method as it analyzes female slaves from the perspective of three groups: travelers, planters, and reformers. Travelers, represented by the English writer Richard Ligon (1585-1662), were in a unique position to observe and analyze Barbados and all its components. According to Susan Scott Parrish, "Ligon's *History of the island of Barbados* was the only comprehensive study of English Caribbean published in the seventeenth century. As such many modern historians have relied heavily on Ligon for details about this most important

of British colonies."[1] Some scholars used Ligon for specific descriptions (as this thesis does), while others used him to argue how traveler accounts were important to ease the fear of colonial life, even if, as Parrish writes, "Other scholars…argue that Ligon sought to promote and domesticate the island to English readers by developing a 'publicist apologetics' that 'normalized oppression and violence as the linchpins of Creole plantation culture.'"[2] This argument is especially important with regard to female slaves.

Planters, the top social group, created the plantation system and laws, and profited from slavery. Analysis of the planter class in the 1600s and 1700s is particularly essential because they structured Barbados economically, physically and socially. Their perspective explains how female slaves were viewed by wealthy and powerful members of society. Scholars such as Richard Dunn and Hilary Beckles, argue that planters perceived female slaves as tools to be used physically and sexually. They saw female slaves as laborers as well as sexual mistresses or companions. In both cases, planters believed that female slaves were their property to control and use.

Reformers will also be utilized in this thesis, as individuals who pursued a political or social cause in addressing the evils of slavery. Their occupations varied, with some being travelers and religious missionaries, while others were authors and abolitionists. With different backgrounds and reasons for discussing slavery in their narratives, they can provide unique viewpoints concerning female slaves. Together, these three perspectives, represented by different classes of early modern Barbadian society, give insight into the lifestyles and

[1] Susan Scott Parrish, "Richard Ligon and the Atlantic Science of Commonwealths," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2010): 216.

[2] Ibid., 216.

motivations of female slaves, also illustrating how female slaves responded to their circumstances.

Section One

Overview of Early Modern Barbados

By the early nineteenth century, Great Britain dominated the world economically and militarily with its control of several countries, including North America and India. It continued to expand in Asia and Africa, using its colonial system to maintain control of the conquered lands and its people. This thesis, however, focuses on the experiences of female slaves in seventeenth and eighteenth century Barbados. Barbados was a distinctive island that attracted many English subjects, and it was the first British Caribbean colony to achieve success with its sugar plantations and large labor force.

After the success of colonizing Ireland under the Tudors, Stuarts, and Cromwell, England established settlements in the Caribbean in the seventeenth century. These settlements were based on Irish plantations, established in the sixteenth century as permanent settlements intended for political control and economic exploitation. The English had observed that other European countries (i.e. Spain and France) benefitted economically when they created settlements in other territories, and therefore established settlements in Ireland, mostly from confiscated land. Encouraged to settle on these lands, English settlers oversaw plantations that ranged in size and value. The first massive plantation was the Munster Plantation.[3] Similar to the Caribbean system, the Munster Plantation was managed by planters, wealthy English subjects who had the resources to maintain the property. These planters did double duty as undertakers, "undertaking" the importation of English subjects as tenants, who in turn rented areas on the plantation where they grew their crops and raised their animals. Hence, plantations became an extension of England. In addition, as Nicolas Canny writes, "this depiction of the nucleus of a colony was so

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[3]For more information about creation of Irish plantations, read Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 121-298.

compelling that it was to be imitated by British plantation projectors in various parts of the Atlantic world in the beginning of the eighteenth century."[4] After establishing the plantations, many settlers felt entitled to the land and its resources, with the English government setting its sights on the Caribbean in the seventeenth century. It was in the Caribbean where the plantation system was perfected, and the system of slavery was established.

Beginning in 1627, Barbados became the pride of England in the Caribbean, boasting a House of Assembly, thriving towns, and a profitable commodity. It was originally settled by the Guyanese ingenious population but was abandoned due to Spanish raids. Because of its geographical location--the easternmost island in the Lesser Antilles--it sometimes was not seen by European ships; however, by the seventeenth century, Barbados became one of the six English colonies in the seventeenth century.[5] According to Jack Greene, "its early success as a staple colony made Barbados a model for all subsequent English settlements in the region, albeit a model that was never fully imitated by any other colony."[6] When the English settled, they grew tobacco, cotton, and ginger, but it was sugar cane that made the settlement profitable and successful. By the 1660s, Barbados was a high functioning colony with the production of sugar and other commodities and the use of indentured servants and slaves.

The busiest bay in Barbados was Carlisle Bay. The town of Carlisle was located near the bay, which was not an ideal location since the town was often swampy as the tide carried water into the town. There were other bays in Barbados, but their locations were not expedient for trading. Early modern travelers described the weather as hot and humid for eight months, and

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[4]Ibid., 132.

[5] The other five was Jamaica, Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, and St. Kitts.

[6] Jack P. Greene, "Changing *Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study,"* in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World,* ed. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 216.

temperate for four months. The air also contained moisture, which caused metals to rust, including locks and ammunition. As a result of the heat and moisture, trees and plants grew abundantly. On the other hand, Barbados lacked rivers and other small bodies of water, forcing inhabitants to rely on rainwater as their source of water. They contained the rainwater into holes in the grounds, which they called ponds, and used water for cooking, washing clothes and bathing.[7]

Besides the bays, the woodland area was abundant and vast, containing several types of trees and plants. In Barbados, the types of trees included the mastic, bully tree, redwood, yellow wood and cedar, with wood used for furniture and other wood imported. However, importing wood was not a priority compared to the inhabitants in Jamaica who imported popular timber like mahogany.[8] As the English settled, they cleared most of the land for cultivation, resulting in much plant life being destroyed during the early seventeenth century due to human greed. The trees were replaced with sugar plantations and living space for people and livestock. Ian Drummond and Terry Marsden have argued that besides environmental consequences, the lack of space would also affect freed slaves; they write, "Because of the small size and singular development, the post-emancipation situation in Barbados was somewhat different to that in some other sugar colonies, for example Jamaica. Relatively little opportunity existed for slaves to leave plantations and engage in some form of subsistence agriculture. Virtually all of the land on the island belonged to the estates and there were no virgin areas to which freed slaves could migrate."[9] White Barbadians were solely interested in the production of sugar and the profit it offered.

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[7] Information about the towns of Barbados can be found in Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 70-75. Also in Sir Robert Hermann Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados: Comprising a Geographical and Statistical Description of the Island* (London: Longman, Brown, Green , and Longsmans, 1848).

[8]For information about the use of trees in the West colonies, see Jennifer L. Anderson, *Mahogany: The Cost of Luxury in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[9]Ian Drummond and Terry Marsden, *The Condition of Sustainability* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 103.

England saw Barbados as an economic opportunity above all. When the English first arrived, they cleared the woodland and prepared the land for farming, growing provisions that made the island livable. Afterward, they experimented with cash crops, initially growing tobacco, though the soil and land were not suitable for the crop. English settlers were also able to grow cotton, but it too was not enough for mass production. Barbadians, therefore, imported cotton, tobacco, wood and ginger, and in return received livestock, farm equipment, hardware, and labor. Eventually, however, the English realized that sugar canes were the best crop for Barbados, and would allow planters to become successful and profitable. Sugar canes thus became the main crop, and a plantation was profitable if it contained equipment like an ingenio or mills that ground the sugar canes.[10]

In the 1650s, the quality of sugar improved and it was a popular commodity needed by England. However, sugar was not a stress-free crop; it required initial financial investment for equipment and land clearing and required vast land clearance and massive deforestation in which, according to David Watts, "the stumps levered out of the ground and burnt…in order to make way for sugar estates."[11] Barbadians learned the process of sugar-making from their Dutch counterparts, who initially provided African slaves to assist in the production of sugar. The growth of sugar was a turning point for Barbados because it created a huge demand for laborers; as Dunn writes, "the island planters continued to employ plenty of indentured white servants, but the striking thing is how eagerly they plunged into the slaveholding business."[12] As a result, sugar bound Africans to plantation life in the West Indies.

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[10] Ligon, *A True and Exact History,* 67-68. Also in David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environment Change Since 1492* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 232-234. Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2013), 80-100.

[11] Watts, *The West Indies,* 184.

[12] Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 69.

Colonial life in Barbados was dominated by the survival of the fittest. For instance, when the English writer Richard Ligon first arrived in Barbados, a plague battered the town, with inhabitants so overwhelmed by the deaths that they could not keep up with the burials. Bodies were thrown into swamps and bogs, which contaminated the water. Besides diseases, settlers had to contend with insects, humidity and heavy rainfall; nevertheless, the plague and weather conditions did not hinder new settlers and the growth of plantations.[13]

Barbadian plantations were similar to Irish plantations. Planters who had available income purchased large and luxurious plantations; similar to the Irish planters, they rented portions of their land to English subjects. The average size of Barbadian plantations was about two hundred acres with most plantations equipped with cattle, water, and wind mills. Ligon believed that "it was far better, for a man that had money, good, or credit to purchase a plantation there ready furnished…than to begin upon a place, where land is to be had for nothing, but a trivial rent, and to endure all hardships, and a tedious expectation, of what profit or pleasure may arise in many year's patience."[14] Those seeking new opportunities needed money to invest in their land. For instance, Colonel Thomas Modyford, a planter, was able to rent five hundred acres on a plantation. The plantation was already stocked with cattle and sugar production equipment, but with five hundred acres, Modyford was also able to grow sugar, tobacco, ginger, cotton and personal produce.[15]

Among the inhabitants of Barbados, food was a unique experience. Bread was not made from wheat, for example, but from cassava, the root of a tropical plant. The root was poisonous when raw, but edible when boiled. The inhabitants used a wheel to grate the cassava, and

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[13]Ibid., 40-41.

[14] Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 66.

[15]Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves¸* 65-69. Ligon, *A True Exact History,* 66-67.

afterwards placed it on a canvas and pressed until all the juices were removed. After it dried in the sun, the leftovers were used to make bread. Inhabitants also made bread with maize (corn) and cassava. The maize made the bread thicker and grainy, constituting another essential food in the diets of inhabitants. Europeans and Africans made several meals with corn including loblolly, or corn ground powder, while another staple was the potato, used to make bread and drink. Tropical staples were plantains and fruits; plums, pineapples and oranges were used for juice.[16] Meat was also important to inhabitants, the popular meat being hogs. Due to the open spaces, they were bigger than the typical swine in England. Other meats available were turkey, fowls, ducks and a variety of birds. When it came to fish, Ligon notes that the inhabitants often wasted opportunities to capture fish. He wrote that "The planters are so good husbands, and tend their profits so much, as they will not spare a Negro's absence so long, as to go to the Bridge and fetch it."[17] However, he did give an example of Colonel Humphrey Walrond, who caught and sold fish because his plantation was near the sea.[18]

The English inhabitants thus created their niche in Barbados. Like a typical Caribbean island, it was humid and sometimes uncomfortable for settlers because of the heat and the mosquitoes. It was evident that the first settlers in Barbados came for success and profit though the numbers of actual inhabitants who settled in Barbados is much debated. Most scholars believed that about 2000 to 5000 English men and women settled in Barbados.[19] The labor force consisted of indentured servants and slaves who toiled away on the plantations. According to Robert Hermann Schomburgk, a British traveler and scholar, Barbados was represented by four

[16] Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 70-79. Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean,* 87-91.
[17] Ligon, *A True and Exact History*. 83.
[18] Ibid., 80-84.
[19] Dunn, Greene and Shaw to name a few scholars who estimated that less than 10, 000 people initially settled in Barbados.

classes. Freeholders or planters were the topmost class and owned land, allowing settlers to rent on their property. The second class was merchants and tradesmen. The majority of these men were former indentured servants "who, having served out the stipulated time, were now freed from their masters and served in the country for wages."[20] The third class consisted of indentured servants who were temporarily bound to the land and worked on plantations. After the servants completed their allotted time of work, they received ten acres for service, though the slaves were bound to labor for life. It is estimated that the Caribbean received approximately 500,000 Africans during the slavery years, with Barbados receiving about 123,000 before the 1700s. Most of these Africans originated from West Africa and Central West Africa.[21] According to Colin Palmer, these Africans "brought their languages, cosmology, kinship systems, culinary practices, music, dance and art to help shape and leave an indelible imprint on the host societies."[22] Their culture seeped into Barbadian life.

This was the setting for female slaves. Contradictions surrounded them. They lived on a beautiful island, but were enclosed by powerful proprietors. They were essential for the continuation of labor, but were considered the last on the social ladder. Foremost, their presence was deemed brazen, yet their voice was silenced as females. These contradictions are seen from the perspective of other classes. However, and paradoxically, it was only through the stories of other social groups that female slaves could be viewed.

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[20] Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados,* 84.

[21] Colin A. Palmer, "Africa in the Making of the Caribbean: The Formative Years," in *Slavery, Freedom and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society,* ed. Brian L. Moore, B.W. Higman, Carl Campbell and Patrick Bryan (Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 42.

[22] Ibid., 44.

Section Two

Traveler's Perspective

Travelers were a unique category: not inhabitants but observers to several events in Barbados. To English readers, they were the eyes and ears of colonization. Accounts by travelers were the first glimpse into Caribbean settlement. Early modern readers relied on their knowledge and took what they said as truth. The most famous Barbadian traveler was Richard Ligon, who was able to witness early Barbados as it became a powerful and prosperous colony. Ligon, a fallen royalist, embarked on his journey Barbados in order to regain his fortune, and he wrote his travel narrative as a guide to new English travelers. In his narrative, he describes the landscapes, the plantations, the inhabitants and the customs of Barbados, and also includes maps and illustrations of Barbados. Besides being a valuable source for scholars, Ligon's account was popular during the seventeenth century. A fellow traveler writing about Barbados in the late 1600s renounced his own history of Barbados, stating, "Not that we shall trouble the reader with a history of the island, that being needless, especially to such as to have ever read ingenious Mr. Ligon on that subject." Ligon's work was thus considered the first important account about Barbados, reflecting also a prevailing view and description.

Ligon embarked on his journey to Barbados on June 16, 1647. At this point he had exhausted his opportunities in England, as a royalist when it was favorable to be a parliamentarian, and one who had also made some bad financial investments by 1640s. [23] He chose instead to seek comfort and prosperity in Barbados, but when he arrived, he realized he needed money to ease the hardships and sufferings of the island and therefore create a prosperous life for himself. As Susan Scott Parrish writes, "Barbados was not a place of relief

[23] Parrish, "Richard Ligon," 210.

from the storms of civil strife he had (putatively) left behind in England; rather, it was a place where the same issues- of the fracture between power and conscience, and of the resulting internecine warfare- stood, though it hardly seemed possible, in greater relief."[24] However, Ligon nevertheless hoped for a better future in Barbados. In the beginning of his work, he wrote, "I found myself a stranger in my own country, and therefore resolved to lay hold on the first opportunity that might convey me to any other part of the world."[25] To Ligon, Barbados was a new beginning and exciting adventure. He was eager to learn about the island, writing about every innovation or resource that was offered in there. As a result, his account of the island is a mixture of observation and opinion, especially when writing about slaves.

There is a level of falsity in his work, however, as Ligon gave little insight into the downside of Barbados. He ignores the social abuses, degradation and the disadvantages of a sugar plantation while remaining a traditionalist in terms of writing about the rulers and those they ruled. For Ligon, the rulers (or planters) were successful and ambitious, while others (servants and slaves) lacked the qualities to be leaders.[26] Of course, this ideology can be found in other Caribbean travelers during the early modern period, especially when race was involved. Travelers, for example, used skin color to distinguish what "other" meant. However, skin color was not a stand-alone category of difference, but a symbol to differentiate Africans and Europeans. In the early modern period, Europeans could be temporarily forced into labor; therefore, skin color and race were one of the few differences between Africans and some Europeans in early modern Barbados. Besides race, travelers also used physical attributes for differentiation, focusing on depictions of the body, more than race, to describe the difference

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[24]Ibid.

[25] Ligon, *A True and Exact History* 40.

[26] Parrish, "Richard Ligon," 217.

between Africans and Europeans. Writers particularly spent more time on the female body. As Jennifer Morgan argues, "early modern English writers did… conventionally set the black female figure against one that was white--and thus beautiful."[27] To travelers, black females were a combination of race and body qualities that promoted separation between Africans and European.

Ligon was forced, however, to confront slavery. Like other travel writers, he can be considered contradictory in his thinking. As Heidi Oberholtzer Lee writes, "Slavery and captivity…disrupted and troubled this assumed relationship between travel and freedom of mobility..and white Anglo-Caribbean travel authors repeatedly returned in their writings to the idea of restricted movement to work out their anxieties about the problems with enslavement."[28] Ligon was free to start a new beginning and build a future, whereas he witnessed slaves forced into a new existence that promoted no freedom. To perhaps ease his anxieties, he focused on the physical attributes of slaves, writing about their mannerisms and how their bodies were meant for slavery. Readers were able to glimpse his struggle with this contradiction. For example, he was genuinely intrigued by African musicality and a desire to become Christian. He was interested in Africans' personality and uniqueness, but he was obligated, as Lee argues, to defend the system of slavery. The reality was that travel writers and Ligon had to convince Europeans back home that slavery was essential to sustain a sugar plantation. [29]

A good example is the comparison between indentured servants and slaves: in Ligon's writings, he sympathized with indentured servants and argued that they were not meant for

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

[28] Heidi Oberholtzer Lee, "Turtle Tears and Captive Appetites: The Problem of White Desire in the Caribbean," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35, no. 3 (2005): 308.

[29] Ibid.

slavery because they were European. To show his disapproval, he described their terrible living conditions in his account, arguing that they worked harder than slaves. Ligon stated that "some cruel Masters will provoke their servants so, by extreme ill usage, and often and cruel beating them, as they grow desperate, and so join together to revenge themselves upon them."[30] For Ligon, it was natural for servants to rebel because by nature they were meant to be free. Two hundred years later, Robert Schomburgk similarly empathized with indentured servants over slaves, writing, "The fate of these unfortunate beings appears in many instances to have been worse than that of negro-slaves."[31] Both accounts ignored the slaves' living conditions and their desperation. Race was essential here because servants were white and naturally inclined into fight for freedom, whereas slaves were black, and therefore sturdier and fit for slavery.

Specifically for female slaves, traveler-writers focused on the female slave's body for purposes of differentiation. Early modern scholars argue that black women were seen as disharmonious beings, indescribable because they contradicted the popular patriarchal view of women, even if they became a symbol of physical difference between whites and blacks.[32] This was why Ligon dismissed the African male body and focused on the female body. Morgan argues that "while descriptions of naked native females evoked desire, travelers depicted black women as simultaneously unwomanly and marked by a reproductive value that was both dependent on their sex and evidence of their lack of femininity."[33] Ligon thus wrote: "Their breasts hang down below their navels, so that when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost down to the ground…at a distance, you would think they had six

[30] Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados,* 96.

[31] Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados,* 84.

[32] Scholars included Peter Erickson, Lynda Boose and Kim Hall. Arguments were seen in Morgan, *Laboring Women,* 14-20.

[33] Morgan, *Laboring Women,* 14.

legs."[34] Keith Sandiford argues that Ligon viewed Barbados and all its parts in economic terms, which included African females. In Cape Verde, Ligon described the African female body as "wanton as the soyle that bred them, sweet as the fruits they fed on." Yet in Barbados, Sandiford argues, "similar bodies are revalued for slave labor and aesthetic purposes."[35] Ligon understood their purpose in Barbados, and therefore his accounts promoted their image, above all, as economic. He did not contemplate the African male body or the Indian female body; instead Morgan argues that travelers expressed their contradictory feelings above all about the African female body. "Writers who articulated religious and moral justifications for the slave trade simultaneously grappled with the character of a contradictory female African body- a body both desirable and repulsive, available and untouchable, productive and reproductive, beautiful and black," he writes.[36]

Early modern Caribbean travelers were contradictory as they sought freedom of adventure, but accepted slavery and the restriction of some people. In terms of gender, African females lacked the physical attributes to be considered Europeans, though travelers also sexually desired them, even if they rejected their lack of civility. There were travel accounts about African males, with the traveler writing about their integrity and endurance; yet female slaves lacked honor. From their perspective, the female slave was an anomaly; as Morgan argues, there was something to be desired about them, but to desire them was to a accept concept of difference. Planters also had to justify the enslavement of not only males but females. Females, in general, were considered weak and inferior; therefore, writers had to diminish female worth and mannerisms to justify why females were enslaved for life.

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[34] Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados,* 103.

[35] Ibid., 17. Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31.

[36] Morgan, *Laboring Women,* 16.

Section Three

Planter's Perspective

In his article "Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study," Jack Greene examines how colonists' identities were shaped by their common goals and expectations in Barbados. He argues that Barbadians had a unique identity compared to other Caribbean colonists because they responded to distinctive physical and social attributes of the island:

> By determining to an important degree what could and could not be done there by its new occupants, by both presenting them with certain opportunities and depriving them of others, these preexisting physical and social attributes of place constituted one of the most important ingredients in defining the identities of the new societies that would be constructed in them.[37]

The inhabitants' identities were also formed by their reactions to different situations in Barbados, with English settlers in Barbados having experiences that were different from inhabitants in England or setters in different Caribbean islands. These settlers' new identity is examined by Greene, who focuses on the planter and elite class. In order to explain their changing identity, Greene identifies three phases. In the first phase, the inhabitants identified with the landscape and its potential for development, while in the second phase, the inhabitants identified with the reality and actual circumstances, setting aside their expectations. Finally, the third phase involved identification of planters as a community with shared ancestry and experiences. In this phase, they identified with the term "Barbadians."[38] Slaves and indentured servants for Greene were not connected to the first phase, while forced laborers had little to no

[37] Jack P. Greene, "Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study," in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World,* ed. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 213.

[38] Ibid., 217.

hopeful expectations about their new settlement. It was only planters and their families that were able to experience all phases.

Greene thus focuses on Barbadian identity by discussing challenges that only related to the elites and planters in Barbados, even though he never acknowledges in his work that he is focusing on one particular social group. For instance, in describing Barbadians' obsession with money, he describes how they displayed their wealth by buying items, furnishing their homes and importing the latest products from Europe.[39] Greene argues, though superficially, that the spending of wealth supported the idea that the inhabitants wanted a permanent home in Barbados. But the growth of permanence also caused social challenges in Barbados. For example, debauchery was a common occurrence, even though other societies benefitted from established laws and ethics to rein in drunkenness and violence. Most planters in Barbados focused on wealth and prosperity, with the establishment of religion or social morality not a priority because it did not relate to wealth. Greene states, "At the same time that they were celebrating its great natural beauty and fecundity and its remarkable capacity for generating wealth through sugar, [they] were depicting an ugly human environment in which morality and risks of economic failure were high the vast labor force cruelly exploited."[40] This example supports the fact that when Green writes about inhabitants, he is writing about the planter class, neglecting the impact its morality had on female slaves, for example. Indentured servants themselves initially did not have the authority to seek wealth, but if they became free, they could become planters and achieve wealth. For slaves, this idea was inaccessible altogether. Even female European settlers did not have the authority to create plantations.

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[39] Ibid., 224.
[40] Ibid., 226.

Greene does not completely ignore slaves or indentured servants in his article. He describes their treatment and their sufferings, but does not detail their changing identity in Barbados. He nevertheless uses the term "Barbadians" throughout his work when in reality he is only discussing Barbadian planters, which leads to the question as to whether slaves are considered Barbadians; just like planters, slaves were permanent figures during the early modern period, and through changes in identity, in terms of rituals, language, and race. Their identity is different from the planter's identity, but still important and essential to understand when focusing on overall changing identities in Barbados.

Richard Dunn is more forthright about his interest in the Barbadian planter class. His work, *Sugar and Slaves*: *The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713*, focuses on the emergence of the planter or elite class in the Caribbean during the early modern period. Examining the early start of Barbados, Jamaica and the Leeward Islands. Dunn depicts the rise of the planter class in Barbados, arguing that while that "We have a detailed political and institutional history of several Caribbean colonies in the seventeenth century…[no previous] works focus on the seventeenth century sugar planters as a social group"[41] When Dunn first published his work in the 1970s, he probably was the first to discuss the planter class in Barbados, though he was soon joined by many others.

Dunn's research on the planter class is significant because of how he used primary sources to create a narrative of the seventeenth century. He argues that planters who came to Barbados in the early 1600s were peasant farmers who focused firstly on their livelihood. It was only after the success of sugar cultivation that the planters became powerful and wealthy.[42] Dunn further argues that planters were responsible for creating a successful slave labor system in

[41] Ibid., 47.
[42] Dunn, *Sugar & Slaves,* 46.

Caribbean: firstly, they kept the slave population low in the 1600s out of fear and desire to maintain control; secondly, slaves were cheaper and easier to acquire than indentured servants. According to Dunn, planters treated servants like property and resented them. They were not above abusing the servants to accomplish the goals. However, as planters further settled and expanded in Barbados, they desired a consistent and permanent labor force. Dunn states:

> Once the Barbadians took the plunge and began importing Negroes from Africa by the boatload, they never looked back. Nor did they pause to consider whether these black laborers had to be enslaved, whether they might not be organized as indentured servants or wageworkers. The African was only attractive to the Englishman as a fixed possession, like a horse or a cow.[43]

Dunn thus tries to understand slavery through the planters' viewpoint, and he relies on planters' narratives to discuss their success and failures.

Planters established and managed plantations, created laws and codes, and held mastery over indentured servants and slaves in Barbados. It took a determined man to move to the Caribbean and make a profit, and the numbers were against him. As David Galenson argues, mortality rates were higher in the West Indies than in New England. Most men took their chances in North America because "features of life in the colonial West Indies that made the region unattractive to Englishmen [were] well known from the vivid accounts of contemporaries."[44] It was a gamble, but if a man was successful, he reaped enormous profit and gained power. Galenson states that successful plantations in Barbados were often large areas that relied on many managers to oversee different tasks. As a result, by the eighteenth century, "it became common for an absentee plantation owner to employ a resident attorney to superintend the planter's estate."[45] Barbadian planters or proprietors had the authority to live

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[43]Ibid., 73.

[44] David W. Galenson, "Population Turnover in the English West Indies in the Late Seventeenth Century: A Comparative Perspective," *The Journal of Economic History* 45, no. 2 (1985):232.

[45] Ibid, 233.

luxuriously once they succeeded in Barbados. Their perspective was thus influenced by their wealth and their desire to earn as much as possible by doing little. Like travel writers, they also had much to say about female slaves.

Slaves mostly worked in the fields with the exception of a few who worked as house slaves. Sugar production required vast land clearings, the planting of sugar cane, and the use of equipment to change cane into exported sugar. Though indentured servants had a hard life, their service was temporary. They were also considered Christians and had some basic rights. On the other hand, slaves faced a life of permanent labor with little support from their planters. According to Greene, "the harsh conditions suffered by the island's numerous laboring populations inevitably translated into fear for the white proprietors. …The prevalence of military titles among plantation owners and the character of their houses testified to their underlying fear of 'being murthered by' their own 'unhappy' laborers."[46] Ligon also noticed that most houses were built in a militaristic style with defensive walls that included "bulwarks, and bastions to defend themselves."[47] In addition, planters feared that their status was temporary, given the current state in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Barbados. Sugar plantations were profitable, but at the expense of the island; a common complaint was that the soil was depleting and "that there is not near one half the sugar made now that used to be made 18 or 20 years ago."[48] Planters were thus fearful that their tides would turn any minute, but did not change their methods because it yielded results. Therefore, planters acquired more slaves and expanded further on the island.

[46] Greene, "Changing Identity in the British Caribbean," 223.
[47] Ligon, *A True and Exact History,* 75.
[48] Anonymous, *A Letter to C.M. a member of Parliament from an Inhabitant of the Island of Barbados,* 2.

In terms of economics and labor, female slaves were considered equal to male slaves in terms of work. Although their price was cheaper, they did the same work as male slaves on sugar plantations. They were required to work during all conditions, including pregnancy; when the female slave was ready to give birth, she was left alone with little help in the delivery. After a week or two of giving birth, she had to return to work, which left little time for her to recover and properly heal after her pregnancy. In addition, she had to carry her baby as she worked in the field. For example, slaves often had quotas to fulfill at the end of a workday; if their task was to clear a section of the plantation, the masters did not differentiate between a healthy young male and a young female who just gave birth. The female slave needed to complete her task while dealing with post pregnancy complications, including carrying her baby on her back, her breaks focused on feeding and nurturing her baby. Similar to livestock, she was thus forced to continue work while caring for her child. In this instance, young men who impregnated young women fared better because they did not suffer during and after pregnancy and were not responsible for an extra person on the field. But it is important to understand that during the early modern period, all slaves were dispensable.[49]

Economically, it is wrong to compare the post-eighteenth century planter class with what came before. As most scholars argue, slavery was not institutionalized in colonies before the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century, slaves were mostly viewed economically, since the planter was primarily interested in the labor and not the socialization of slaves. In addition, there were more slaves born in Africa than slaves born in Barbados.

Socially, planters did differentiate among female slaves, however. According to Hilary Beckles, "Creole slave women were likely to be treated better materially and socially than

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[49] Hilary Beckles, *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999), 22-60.

African women."[50] Creoles, or those of African or mixed African descent born in the Americas, often became house slaves. Another example was slave naming. Handler and Jacoby argue that slave naming did not follow certain rules, but depended on the plantation and master. It was common for West African slaves to have several names during their lifetime, but in some plantations, masters only named the slaves they fathered. In the eighteenth century, Handler and Jacoby illustrate, slaves often had a Christian name and a plantation name.[51] Though they were not Christians, they sometimes participated in Christian rituals. On a Caribbean island, a female slave who coupled with her master was allowed to baptize her children, with the master calling the minister to the plantation and having the minister perform baptism rites.[52] However, slave naming was still abnormal in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the nineteenth century, planters would argue that breeding and naming slaves was smarter militaristically and socially.[53]

Legally, planters feared rebellions and wanted to create laws to subdue slaves, with Barbados becoming the first English colony to pass slave codes. As Barbados became the most prosperous colonial colony in the seventeenth century, it wrestled with the increase of slaves and the threat of rebellion. The slave codes promoted obedience among slaves. In addition, early modern Barbados had a large population of indentured servants; slave codes were therefore a tool to distinguish between slaves and servants. As Edward Rugemer argues, "the comprehensive acts of 1661 represent the Barbados Assembly's conscious effort to establish the guidelines of New World mastery and to create clear distinctions between the status of "Christian

[50] Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 20.

[51] Jerome S. Handler and JoAnn Jacoby, "Slave Names and Naming in Barbados, 1650-1830," *Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture* 53, no. 4 (1996): 686- 694.

[52] See Nicholas M Beasley, "Domestic Rituals: Marriage and Baptism in the British Plantation Colonies, 1650-1780," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 76, no. 3 (2007): 327-357 for Caribbean marriage and baptism rites.

[53] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* 112.

servants" and that of "Negro slaves.'"[54] Sir John Jennings and Sir Percivale wrote the acts and statutes for Barbados in 1652. Jennings, a clerk of the Barbadian assembly, in the preamble of *Acts and Statutes of the Island of Barbados*, wrote: "It is therefore of some concernment as you are entrusted here, and to your good discharge before the great Tribunal hereafter, that you perform the diligence and care of men designed, and [are] called to propagate piety and advance public good."[55] He wanted the assembly and the governor to set an example for all Barbadians by promoting and following the laws. He further wrote, "I have adventured on the emission of this work…to present the people a cheap penny worth of your own labours for the public good."[56] His project was important because it created laws for slaves, including female slaves, just as these laws addressed challenges with the slave system, and importantly, the relationship between female slaves and white men in Barbados.

There were a total of 102 acts and statutes organized by Jennings for public circulation in Barbados in 1661. These acts and statutes varied in topic, covering property, docking in Barbados, individual rights, land rights and the assignment of punishment. No social class was ignored in the acts and statutes. There were ten laws that concerned indentured servants, six laws that concerned slaves and four laws that concern women.[57] These acts and statutes described the policies for indentured servants and slaves, as well as offering glimpses of female rights in Barbados. Focusing on indentured servants, the laws were mostly about their temporary servitude and the consequences of committing a crime as a servant. For example, Act Five

[54] Edward B. Rugemer, "The Development of Mystery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century," *Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture* 70, no. 3 (2013): 431.

[55] John Jennings, Acts *and Statutes of the Island of Barbados* (London: Will. Bentley, 1654.)

[56] Ibid., 3.

[57] Most of the laws for indentured servants, slaves and women overlapped. These laws solely focused on indentured servants, slaves and women. Act seven focused on both indentured servants and slaves. Whereas, act ten, focused on indentured servants who were women.

discussed the maximum years of an indentured servant: if an English person was brought into indentured servitude in Barbados, but had no official contract from England, they were still bonded into service. The act stated that all servants under the age of eighteen served seven years and servants over the age of eighteen served five years. After they served, they received four hundred pounds of sugar.[58] This act supported the system of "Barbadosed," where English subjects were sent to Barbados as servants.[59]

Some acts and statutes addressed the free inhabitants' relationship with slaves. These acts acknowledged the problem of excessive sexual behavior in Barbados. For example, Act Twelve discussed the issue of free inhabitants entertaining servants and slaves. This act was one of the few that addressed sexual intercourse between Europeans and slaves. It stated:

> Whosoever shall entertain any man, or woman, white or black, above one night, if he doth not know him to be a free-man, shall for every night after the first, forfeit one hundred pounds of sugar, and if he know to be a servant, or slave to another man,…he shall forfeit five hundred pounds of sugar for every night. …And if any suspected person come within any plantation at unreasonable hours,..it shall be lawful for the master, his overseer or servants to apprehend such person.[60]

This law tried to punish men or women who sought long-term companionship with servants or slaves, though they were allowed one night of indulgence. It is interesting that the act stated, "Any man or woman," which could be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is that the law was addressing white female Barbadians who slept with African slaves. The other interpretation could be the acknowledgement of homosexuality in Barbados. Whatever the reason for writing this act, the law addressed sexual relations between white

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[58] Jennings, *Acts and Statutes,* 16.

[59] For more information about Barbadosed and books related to this subject, visit "Barbadosed," Tangled Roots, accessed August 3, 2014, http://www.yale.edu/glc/tangledroots/Barbadosed.htm.

[60] Jennings, *Acts and Statutes*, 20-21

Barbadians and slaves, supporting the fact that there existed sexual exploitation of slaves, specifically female slaves.

Acts and statutes that related to women were few, however. Like their male counterparts, female slaves were considered property, and therefore treated as things or objects. Among the acts solely focused on female slaves and servants, Act Ten addressed female servants who were impregnated by Barbadians, with the father ordered to serve the master for three years or offer a substitute to serve the master. Planters who impregnated another master's servant could also offer a servant as compensation. This law thus tried to address sexual consequences, but only among servants; by ignoring the Barbadians' impregnation of slaves, this act therefore acknowledged that slaves had no rights or protection under law.

Planters also used law codes to diminish rebellions. Gary Puckrein argues that planters feared slave rebellions, and made decisions in Barbados out of fear and the need to maintain power. Since Barbadian plantations were relatively large compared to New England plantations, planters feared that a rebellion, and consequently the slaves' capture of a plantation, would cause the destruction of all plantations.[61] While a majority of white subjects, like Ligon, argued that Africans were happy as slaves, the reality was that slaves suffered and desired freedom. Slavery accelerated in the 1620s, and by 1670s, rebellion plots were devised, started by either the African slaves or the indentured servants. In the early seventeenth century, scholars argued that planters believed indentured servants were most likely to start a rebellion. Since the indentured servants were mostly Irish, the conflict between the English and Irish was still fresh in the planter's minds.[62] This changed in the eighteenth century as indentured servitude dropped and slavery

[61] Gary A. Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 430-432.

[62] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* 504.

became a permanent fixture in the islands. The continuous growth of the African population caused many planters to focus on establishing control and obedience among their slaves. As Beckles writes, "If anything, the remaining Irish inhabitants were considered by the English as tolerable social misfits."[63] Instead, Africans now needed to be tame and controlled.[64]

Naturally, slave rebellions affected female slaves in many ways. Firstly, female slaves could participate in slave plots against their masters, and subsequently faced the consequences for rebelling. Secondly, female slaves were witnesses to rebellions that often disrupted the island. As witnesses, they were able to observe the planning of the plot, the execution of the plot if the slaves were lucky, the collapse of the plot and the death of African plotters.[65] Lastly, female slaves could be informers for their masters, selling out their fellow slaves either because of loyalty or for their own benefit. An example of a female slave informer is seen in the report, *Great News from Barbados or a True and Faithful Account of the Grand Conspiracy of the Negroes against the English* written in 1676. This anonymous report detailed Barbadian slaves' act of rebellion in the 1670s. The anonymous writer describes the rebellion through the account of a female slave, Anna, a house slave who overheard a fellow slave discussing whether other slaves should kill all the white people in Barbados. In addition, she also learned that they planned to set the sugar canes on fire and appoint an African as their king to rule over them in Barbados, making Barbados an independent country that was not governed by England or other Europeans.[66] Anna informed her master of this plot, which was crushed before implementation.

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[63] Ibid., 522.

[64] See Matthew Galien, Caribbean Slave Revolts and the *British* Abolitionist Movement (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

[65] In Barbados, the punishment for slaves was death. Execution of slaves was often public spectacles to ease the fear of white citizens and to set an example to slaves that rebellion was not tolerated. For more information about slaves and punishment, read

[66] *Great News from the Barbados or A True and Faithful Account of the Grand Conspiracy of the Negroes against the English* (London: Goat-Court, 1676), 9-11.

The anonymous writer praised Anna, stating that hers "was the first discovery that I can learn [of that] came to the knowledge of the worthy inhabitant of that noble and most flourishing island."[67] Though the writer praises Anna, it is evident that she betrayed her fellow slaves. Anna was a house slave, which meant that she was trustworthy to her masters and most likely Creole, whereas, the "Cormantee" slaves were new slaves who recently arrived from the African coast. Anna's information was enough to spring the planters into action. They informed the governor of the conspiracy, and according to the anonymous writer, over a dozen colonels and field officers were set as judges to punish the accused. In the first round up, seventeen slaves were found guilty and executed. According to the anonymous writer, "six [were] burnt alive, and eleven beheaded, their dead bodies being dragged through the streets, at Spikes a pleasant Port-Town in that island, and were afterwards burnt with those that were burned alive."[68] This report was also unique because it detailed slaves' punishments. In any case, the rebellion was squashed and the planters were victorious.

Though Anna and the rebels shared a life in slavery, their status was different. Anna's Creole identity and house slave position did not make her betrayal strange or unique. Female slaves were certainly connected to rebellions in written accounts of the early modern period, but a name was rarely attached to them. Instead, Schomburgk wrote that, "Anna prevailed afterwards upon the young negro to reveal the conspiracy to her master,"[69] while Ligon also mentions Anna, as a savior who prevented a rebellion. As a female slave, she is therefore only given a name when she benefits the planters and the Barbadian slave system.

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[67] Ibid., 11.
[68] Ibid,, 12.
[69] Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados,* 304.

Another slave was named in the report, however. During the trial and execution of the rebels, a slave was coaxed into confessing more names. Before he could confess, another slave, named Tony, reportedly stated, "thou fool, are there not enough of our country-men killed already? Art thou minded to kill them all?"[70] According to the writer, the slave who was coaxed did not speak again. In addition, even though Tony was harassed for his actions by the crowd, he reportedly responded, "if you roast me today, you cannot roast me tomorrow."[71] Tony was adamant in his resolve to die without betraying his fellow slaves. Tony is named though he is a rebel; yet, other female rebels were not named, which illustrates that female slaves were only important when they were useful.

From a planter's point of view, female slaves were not unique or special. They were only valuable if they were healthy and could work in the fields. They received no special treatment because of pregnancy or sickness, and they received a lesser portion of food than male slaves. However, female slaves were also desired by planters, with sexual exploitation rampant in early modern Barbados. Similarly, planters relied on female slaves to care for their families, though they often feared that these slaves would hurt their families. Beckles argues that "this complicated emotional and psychological entanglement presented slave holders with much discomfort."[72] Focusing on William Dickson, a contemporary writer who wrote about slavery in Barbados, Beckles writes that "he recognized that it was difficult to generalize on this matter [of slave relations] and offered two opposing cases as evidence. In one, [the] master attempted to chop off his domestic's ear…in the other, he described how masters deliberately pursed intimate sexual relations with domestics."[73] Legally, planters had the right to female slaves' bodies, but they also

[70] *Great News from the Barbados,* 12.
[71] *Ibid.,* 12.
[72] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* 69.
[73] Ibid.

realized that they could not fully control a female slave through fear, reward or desire. This is why they feared them, though they were granted into intimate spaces, like the nursery, kitchen or the bed. It was a female slave's choice to follow her master or rebel.

Reformers' Perspectives

The Barbadian planter class is important because they created colonial Barbados. They also established the social norms and laws, and provided an economic guide to success. One cannot analyze Barbados from 1600 to 1800 without analyzing the planter class. Nevertheless, the planter class should not be the only focus when discussing early modern Barbados. Reformers' writings also deserve attention, for what they revealed about women, slaves, servants and other social groups that populated Barbados.

As stated in the introduction, reformers were people who pursued a political or social cause, wrote works that challenged the current system and gave alternatives to fix the growing moral problem of slavery. This section focuses on men or women who examined social issues that related to female slaves in Barbados. Though together they focused on similar issues, their backgrounds varied. Some were involved in religious work and forced to confront the problem of Christianity and slavery, while others were abolitionists trying to end British involvement with the slave trade. A few were writers focusing the social issues of their day. All viewed slavery, specifically female slaves, differently.

In the seventeenth century, slavery was a debated topic undertaken by English men and women who questioned the need for slaves. Early modern works about slavery focused on England's involvement in the slave trade, whether Africans were suited for slavery and what happened if slavery was abolished in West Indies.[74] Englishmen and women who opposed slavery had a hard time convincing their fellow countrymen for two reasons. First, these writers often believed themselves that Africans were inferior to Europeans; though they opposed the enslavement of Africans, they often denied that Africans were on the same par as Europeans and

[74] Sources include William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery,* (1789). Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (London, 1788).

that Africans greatly suffered in slavery. For instance, Reverend Henry Evans Holder wrote an essay about slavery focusing on Barbados in 1738, arguing that it was not essential to keep Africans enslaved in the West Indies because most were born on the island and perceived the island as their home. He also argued that after years of enslavement, most Africans were loyal to their masters, and therefore, there was no need for physical restraints.[75] Holder believed that Africans would remain on the plantation because their master treated them with care and dignity. He argued that "within these last twenty years…the condition of our slaves has been meliorated in the same proportion: they are better fed, and more generally clothed."[76] Holder only supports the end of slavery because he thinks that Africans would be loyal to their masters and continue to serve them.

The second reason that abolitionists struggled to convince their peers that slavery was wrong was the fact that obvious contradictions underlay many attitudes toward Africa and slavery. Rev. James Ramsey, for example, acknowledged this fact by arguing that many readers were often confused by abolitionists who would talk about Africa being a rich country, only to later explain that Africa was a dreadful place.[77] Ramsey, who was against slavery, wrote his essay in the form of question and answer to avoid such contradictions. The questions were objections about ending the slave trade. For example, objection one states, "The planter would show his resentment of the measure, by treating his slaves more cruelly than before?" Ramsey responds that the planter will treat his property better because there was no alternative means to get more slaves.[78]

[75] Henry Evans Holder, *A Short Essay on the Subject of Negro Slavery, with a Particular Reference to the Island of Barbados* (London, 1738), 17.

[76] Ibid., 20.

[77] James Ramsey, *Objections to the Abolition of Slave Trade with Answers* (London, 1788), 6-26.

[78] Ibid., 28.

Both of these reasons stemmed from a particular understanding about race. In the early modern period, race was a distinction used to separate Europeans from the Africans. As more Europeans settled in the Caribbean and accepted it as their new home, their ties to English culture became harder to sustain. It also did not help that there were Europeans forced into servitude, albeit a temporary service. Therefore, race was an important symbol for Barbadians to separate Africans and Europeans. As a result, early modern activists had to be careful when promoting African rights; they acknowledged race as a difference, but promoted the idea of humanity towards Africans, a concept that could be seen in several discourses, including religion, memoirs and literature.

A common social issue was religion. In the seventeenth century, it was still a divisive issue in England. Therefore, it was not surprising that Barbados had its share of religious conflict, which eventually affected slaves. Slaves were not allowed to become Christians; for example, Ligon describes a conversation between himself and a plantation master about converting slaves to Christianity. The master informed Ligon that it was against the law to "make a Christian a Slave."[79] The master further explained to Ligon that once a slave became a Christian then he was no longer a slave. This connects with a prevailing theory that Africans became slaves because they lacked souls. In addition, Christians were naturally inclined to rights, whereas the English argued that Africans were by nature unholy, wicked and immoral and therefore needed to be tamed or controlled. To establish a distinction between Africans and Europeans in enslavement, the English thus used Christianity as the divider with laws arguing that Christians were not subject to lifelong enslavement, and they were entitled to protection. Heidi Lee argues that "Early modern Europeans envisioned their differences as defined not

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[79] Ligon, *A True and Exact History*, 101.

necessarily by race, but, rather, by other oppositional qualities--for example, the holy and the heretical, the civilized and the savage, or, arguably the most important category in the eighteenth century, the free and the enslaved."[80] Nevertheless, the debate about slaves becoming Christians kept surfacing in the 1600s and 1700s.

Morgan Godwyn was an Anglican minister who travelled to Barbados and in 1681 wrote about the topic of converting Africans and slaves to Christianity. In his work *The Negro's & Indians Advocate*, he argued that it made sense to accept Africans and Indians into Christianity because it was their duty as Christians to promote the faith. He used the examples of Catholics who visited foreign lands to spread their religion, writing, "some others do make this very thing an essential mark of the Catholic Church, and from thence would prove their Religion true, and ours, at the same time, false."[81] He argued that Catholics could claim that Protestants were thereby not truly Christians because currently they were not promoting their faith. Godwyn also used a simple argument that Africans who became Christians would learn the English language and make the Caribbean their permanent home. He further claimed that slaves have "naturally an equal Right with other Men to the exercise and privileges of religion."[82] Godwyn here used the term, *naturally,* which connects them to a basic form of humanity; Godwyn was thus not arguing to repeal slavery, but to educate the natives and African slaves. He believed that Africans were knowledgeable and argued that they were ignorant because they were not educated, and though he did not reject slavery, he questioned the brutality of it.[83] His thought process was once again connected to belief that Africans had basic rights.

[80] Lee, "Turtle Tears and Captive Appetites," 307.

[81] Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro's & Indians Advocate: Suing for their Admission into the Church (*London, 1680), 4.

[82] Ibid., 7.

[83] Ibid, 8-20.

Godwyn was championing on behalf of all slaves, including women. However, many African women were content with practicing their African religion. Barbara Bush has argued that "Black women in the Caribbean played a prominent role in religious ceremonies and resistance stemming from religious practices, and slave religion, even after the introduction of Christianity, had a high African content."[84] Women who practiced African religion were seen as spiritual and medicinal healers, and were often mistaken as witches practicing magic by white inhabitants. While in labor terms, slaves were less valuable as they got older, this differed when it came to slaves' religion, in which elder female slaves were valued for their wisdom and knowledge of the old ways.[85] When it came to Christianity, however, female slaves were not receptive to Christian ritual and teachings. Bush argues that "women had little to gain from the Christian religion; the strict Pauline doctrines of Christianity emphasized female inferiority and subordination in sharp contrast to the sexual egalitarianism of West African religions."[86] Instead, they saw benefit in being religious leaders and spiritual guides in their African religion.

While there were individual men and women writing about slavery and Christianity, Quakers, as a whole, argued that slaves should be taught Christianity to save themselves from their immorality. The Quaker religion was a Christian sect founded in England by George Fox in 1647 during the divisive English Civil War, rejecting formal sacraments, ministry, and doctrines of beliefs, and advocating for pacifism. By the 1670s, the Quaker religion reached Barbados, with estimates that one thousand Quakers resided there by 1680.[87] Mary Fisher and Ann Austin, the first Quakers to journey to the Atlantic, travelled to Barbados to spread

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[84] Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 153.

[85] Ibid., 154.

[86] Ibid., 156.

[87] For information about Quakers in Barbados, read Larry Dale Gregg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging Culture of the Planter Class* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 1.

Quakerism in 1655, and shared with other Quakers several reasons for coming to Barbados. Fisher and Austin came as missionaries and tried to convert the inhabitants, including slaves, while others were sent as indentured servants, punishment for continuing to practicing their religion after the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Finally, most Quakers simply wanted the freedom to practice their faith. Whatever the reason, many Quakers were disturbed by the lifestyles of the inhabitants and slaves, and tried to fix the immorality they perceived as residing there.

Those who promoted religion thus believed in the innate humanity of Africans. It did not mean that they supported the end of slavery or that Africans were equal. Instead, they believed that Africans had basic rights as humans, including freedom of religion. Samuel Buckley, a Quaker who wrote about the destruction of government officials who wronged Quakers, himself felt that slaves were "naturally inclined to looseness and wickedness,"[88] stating that "[the Quakers'] indispensible duty [is] to set some time apart to labour with [the slaves], and to instruct them in the things of God…whereby they might be led out of stealing, murdering, plotting, and of their uncleanness and adultery."[89] Quakers believed Christianity saved male and female slaves from degradation, since slaves naturally sought sin while Christian lessons would diminish their sinful behavior. Quakers' desire to convert slaves caused conflict with planters, however. In the nineteenth century, Schomburgk wrote, "Their endeavors to instruct the negroes were however considered dangerous, as promulgating a sense of equality, which might lead to insurrections, and many were obliged to leave the island in consequence of severe prosecution."[90] Quakers also interfered with the economy by promoting education and religion among slaves. Planters wanted them to stop converting slaves, while the Quaker founder,

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[88] Samuel Buckley, *A Short Account of the Manifest Hand of God that hath Fallen upon Several Marshals and their Deputies* (London, T. Sowle, 1696), 17.

[89] Ibid., 18.

[90] Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados* 94.

George Fox, responded that "God's love was universal." [91] However, Gregg Larry argues that "few, however, wanted to use religion as a tool to manage the slave population."[92] Planters viewed Christianity as a European trait, and by the 1800s, Quakers diminished as a presence after a backlash in Barbados, which failed to convince planters to convert slaves to the true faith.

Female slaves themselves had many rituals that were connected to faith, if not always the "correct" one. For instance, at a slave's death in the evening "they bury him, clapping and wringing their hands, and making a doleful sound with their voices."[93] They mourned for a lost soul without the use of the Christian religion, which would not save them from enslavement. Ligon writes about an incident concerning their faith on a particular plantation. Slaves believed in a form of reincarnation, where they would return to their African country when they died. This belief encouraged slaves to kill themselves to avoid suffering and to speed up their reincarnation. Essentially, this belief gave slaves an escape from slavery, frustrating plantation masters; many female slaves also hanged themselves to avoid punishment from their masters. Colonel Walrond, a planter, was tired of the suicides and decided to cut the head off a slave's corpse and parade the head in front of the slaves, explaining to them that their idea of rebirth was foolish because the body was still present after death. Ligon wrote, "Being convinced by this sad, yet lively spectacle, they changed their opinions; and after that, no more hanged themselves." This act ended their hope of escape and freedom, teaching female slaves that religion and faith would not ease enslavement. Even so, many continued to practice their African faith and ritual even when they finally were allowed to convert to Christianity.

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[91] Gragg, *Quaker Community on Barbados*, 121.
[92] Ibid., 122.
[93] Ligon, *A True and Exact History,* 102.

Apart from religion, race was a difficult concept to understand in the early modern period. Morgan argues, “For English slave-owners in Americas, neither the decision to embrace the system of slavery nor the racialized notion of perpetual hereditary slavery was natural.”[94] She further writes, “English settlers constructed an elaborate edifice of forced labor on the foundation of emerging categories of race and reproduction.”[95] This gave many abolitionists leeway to attack slavery, which had not yet been fully connected to dark skin. Morgan believed that “a concept of ‘race’ rooted firmly in biology was primarily a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century phenomenon.”[96] Therefore, many early abolitionists, including William Wilberforce, James Spencer and Olaudah Equiano, believed that not all Africans were meant for slavery and not all white people were pious and holy--a belief that could be seen in the memoirs of Africans, either written by former slaves or written on the behalf of a slave.[97]

It was a misconception that slaves could not voice their own concern about their plight in the early modern period. Advocates against slavery sometimes sought a slave’s firsthand account about his or her condition to rally the English masses. Slave trade companies, meanwhile, promoted the idea that slavery was a mutual action between Africans and Europeans, with Africans trading their people for European goods. Though this statement has some truth, the reality was that most Africans were tricked and captured into enslavement. In addition, the African nations that traded people had a different understanding of slavery and did not associate slavery with lifelong servitude. To make the truth known, escaped slaves wrote about their struggle and asked Parliament to end slavery. Their efforts can be seen in the collection of slaves’ petitions, entitled *England’s Slavery, or Barbados Merchandize*--collections that were

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[94] Morgan, *Laboring Women,* 12
[95] Ibid.,
[96] Ibid., 13.
[97] Gelien, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, 28-96.

organized in 1659 by Marcellus Rivers and Oxenbridge Foyle, freedmen who escaped to England. These petitions' main goal was to prove that Africans were unwillingly forced into slavery, which contradicted general English policies.

In their letter to Parliament, Rivers and Foyle wrote that in Barbados, there were:

> Four thousand and five hundred miles different from their native country, wives, children, parents, friends, and all that is near and dear unto them, the captive petitioners and the others being all the way kept lockt under decks (and guards) among horses, that their souls through heat and steam, (under the tropics) fainted in them, and never till they come to the island, knew, where they were going.[98]

Writing about these slaves' confusion and despair after arriving to Barbados, Rivers and Foyle further explained to Parliament that slaves had little to eat or drink and were forced into terrible conditions on the island. They end their letter stating that the petitioners "remonstrate on behalf of themselves and the others…and earnestly beg, since they are not under any pretended conviction of law, that this high and honorable court will be pleased to examine this arbitrary power of slavery"[99] Rivers and Foyle were the lucky ones, because they were freed slaves in England denouncing slavery. Little is known about their past, especially if they were ever actually slaves in Barbados. Unlike other writers who struggled with defending slaves, they argued that these Africans were victims regardless of their race or intelligence; while they did not focus on the humanity of Africans, they concentrated on the claim that it was inhumane to capture people against their will. As they argued, these people were not criminals and they were not aware of their situation; therefore, the entire concept of slavery was arbitrary. Another significant aspect of Rivers and Foyle resided in the fact that they called themselves true gentlemen because they were defending the dignity of others. In English history, a gentleman

[98] Marcellus Rivers and Oxenbridge Foyle, *England's Slavery or Barbados Merchandize* (London, 1659), 4.

[99] Ibid., 6.

was increasing viewed as trustworthy person distinguished by honor and thoughtfulness, and not necessarily by noble birth. Rivers and Foyle therefore believed that because they were defending and supporting the victims of slavery, they were gentlemen by definition.

The petitions that were written by Africans thus focused on the suffering of slaves, and solicited Parliament to end slavery. One petitioner called Barbados a "protestants' purgatory,"[100] an island that was not fit for anyone, especially slaves. The petitioner escaped slavery, but was "miserable with my fellow sufferers left behind."[101] Another petitioner asked parliament to grant slaves their rights in order to end the practices under slavery. All wrote about the forced capture of Africans, and viewed their cause from a legal perspective, championing for both male and female African rights. A female slave would welcome their support because petitions represented the best hope for them for several reasons. Firstly, they treated them with dignity by highlighting the poor condition that slaves faced, while other accounts ignored the terrible work conditions and assumed that Africans were used to this labor. Secondly, the petitioners argued that these slaves had children, wives, parents and other family members who mourned for them, therefore acknowledging that Africans had a life before slavery. While female slaves were examined as chattel or purely physical objects by travelers and planters, petitioners saw them as fellow human beings with family and worthiness. Finally, there was evidence that both male and female Africans petitioned Parliament, which constituted a form of empowerment, and a means to gain freedom. Obviously, parliament did not act in the 1600s to end slavery. However, these petitions were another form of resistance, allowing Africans, both former and current slaves, a platform to let English citizens know that they did not welcome slavery and hard labor did not befit them.

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[100] Ibid., 8

[101] Ibid., 8.

Beyond petitions, slave women were also engaged in the process of abolition. Bush believes that slave women "were primary agents in the emancipation of the slave community,"[102] even if, in the Barbados slave system, a majority of women were field workers and only a few were house slaves. There were many ways that African women supported anti-slavery work. One way was escaping slavery, with a few female slaves able to escape from the West Indies to Britain. Some of these runaways were lucky, as Midgley writes, "finding refuge in the sizable black communities which had grown up in the slave trading ports of London, Bristol and Liverpool.[103] Another form of resistance was joining slave revolts, which involved the cooperation of both female and male slaves, even if women were equally punished, along with men, for their involvement in these revolts.

Memoirs—real or fictional--are another important source in revealing the lives of female slaves and their acts of agency. Kate Chedgzoy argues that memory "is crucial to understanding oneself as a social subject," with memoirs constituting written memories that allow a person to not only understand him or herself, but to allow the public to understand who he or she is. [104] In the nineteenth and twentieth century, slave memoirs were widely available as men and women discussed their experiences as slaves in the Americas. Contrastingly, there were few slave memoirs in the 1600s, and a majority of these accounts discussed life before slavery, with most memoirists claiming to have been born on African soil. Other works assumed the fictional form of a memoir. A famous example is *The Royal Africa, or Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe,* a fictional account actually written by an English man who wrote the "memoirs" of

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[102] Barbara Bush, "Toward Emancipation: Slave Women and Resistance to Coercive Labour Regimes in the British West Indian Colonies, 1790-1838," in *Abolition and its Aftermath,* ed. David Richardson (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1985), 31.

[103] Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870,* ebook (London, Routledge, 2005), section VI.

[104] Kate Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World: Memory, Place and History, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

a young African prince in the hope of explaining the misfortunes of slavery. The young prince resides in Annamaboe before the English Civil war starts, in a region--Guinea--known for slave traders. However, Annamaboe is a prosperous town that does not need to sell slaves. According to the account, the King has such a great relationship with France that he allows one of his sons to journey to France to learn about the country; that son is welcomed and treated like a noble, coming back to Annamaboe and praising the French for their hospitality. Seeing an opportunity to gain access to Annamaboe, an English captain then tries to convince the King to send one of his sons to England. The King, believing that England would show the same respect, as did France, allows one of his sons to journey to England. The son claims that he is "full of the fond hopes of seeing the world, [and] impatient to depart," but the prince is tricked by the captain and sold to slavery. [105] He arrives in Barbados confused and ashamed for believing the English captain; the author states, "He saw numbers in the like condition, from a variety of accidents, but none of them in any degree comparable to that which had brought this heavy lot upon him."[106] He is grateful that he has a kind master, but the pain is always with him; like all slaves, he is named, but that name does not represent his true self. Eventually, his father realizes the deceit and pushes the trading company to release his son; fearing trouble if it does not, the company allows the prince to go home with his master in full support.

This biographical account is interesting, but not unique as there were many tales of English captains tricking people into slavery. For example, Ligon writes about a beautiful female Indian from South America who was impregnated by a European servant. An English ship arrived at her home and was attacked by other Indians, though she fell in love with a young man from the ship, protected him from the Indians, and guided him back to his ship. She went abroad with him,

[105] Anonymous, *The Royal African: or Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe,* 39.
[106] Ibid., 41.

hoping to live happily together with him, though he rewarded her kindness by selling her to slavery in Barbados. [107] Both accounts featured deceit from English men, but what is evident about the prince's story is his desire to escape and remember who he was. He is named in slavery, but never acknowledges that slave name; seeing other Africans forced to accept a new identity, he witnesses the pain of accepting that one would be a slave for life.

The accounts also discuss how Africans were made slaves. It was not a fair business where the trader acquired current slaves or servants from an African kingdom; instead, the process relied, as mentioned, on tricks and manipulation on the part of the English to acquire a large amount of people. Ligon's memoir is important for understanding female slaves because it further supports that idea the Africans were forced into slavery and had to cope with the humiliation of slavery. They also had to contend with a new world and the prospect of being a slave for life. There was a successful conclusion for the prince, but most slaves were not lucky.

Besides biographical or memoiristic accounts, other literature also focused on slavery, which was a new and for English readers strange subject, with many reading travel accounts to learn about their English counterparts in the Caribbean, and naturally welcoming fiction on the subject. The English dramatist and writer Aphra Behn was one of many who wrote about slavery in a fictional sense; according to Jacqueline Pearson, Behn's fiction often centered on "highly individualized, often female, narrators, and [used] them to foreground issues of gender and power by offering ironic and mocking reversals of codes of authority, even by undermining the meaning of the stories as they tell them."[108] Behn herself travelled to several British colonies; in Surinam, a former English colony that was ceded to the Dutch in the late 1600s, she was inspired by a slave

[107] Ibid. 107.

[108] Jacqueline Pearson, "Gender and Narrative in the Fiction of Apra Behn," *Review of English Studies* 42, no. 166 (1991): 184.

to write a short prose fiction called *Oroonoko.* This story was significant not only because it was written by a female writer but because it featured a love story between two slaves; according to Kate Chedgzoy, the work also represented "the earliest American novel, the first fiction in English with an African hero, and 'the first literary work in English to grasp the global interactions of the modern world.'"[109]

Oroonoko is a story about a former prince's experience as slave. The prince, Oroonoko, is a strong and popular soldier from Cormantien and successor to the throne; Behn describes him as an intelligent, respectful and strategic young man, with impeccable manners and a physical appearance that is resembles a strong and noble Roman.[110] In Africa, he meets Imoinda, a beautiful woman, and falls in love with her. However, the king, his grandfather, also falls in love with Imoinda and forces her to become one of his wives. Oroonoko, who cannot forget her, sneaks to her at night and eventually takes her virginity. The King is very jealous and sells both to slavery. Behn writes that the prince "resolved to perish for want of food; and pleased at last with that thought, and toiled and tired by rage and indignation, he laid himself down, and sullenly resolved upon dying."[111] The English captain, seeing great profit in Oroonoko, swears to the young prince that if he eats, he would set all the captives free. But the captain lies and delivers Oroonoko and everyone else as slaves to Surinam. Behn writes, "[Oroonoko] beheld the captain with a look all fierce and disdainful, upbraiding him with eyes that forced blushes on his guilty cheeks; he only cried in passing over the side of the ship, 'Farewell, Sir, tis worth my sufferings to gain so true a knowledge both of you and of your gods by whom you swear."[112] Later on, the African prince's demeanor causes many plantation owners to respect him and treat him differently from other

[109] Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World,* 168.
[110] Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko or the Royal Slave: A true History* (London,1688), 11.
[111] Ibid., 41.
[112] Ibid., 45.

slaves; however, the prince is still depressed, but in a surprise twist, Imoinda is also enslaved on the island. Depressed herself before she saw Oroonoko again, she and he are now happy and together, though they cannot ignore the restraints of slavery. For example, they know that if a slave is pregnant, the baby is considered the planter's property and could be sold or traded; this thought is present when Imoinda becomes pregnant. Oroonoko tries to petition parliament to become a free man, but fails. Growing desperate, he tries to stage a slave revolt and is punished for his disobedience. Still in the same predicament, Imoinda pleads to Oroonoko to kill her. He sadly goes ahead with it and later is executed, but he calmly accepts his own death. Behn ends the novel writing, "Thus died this great man, worthy of a better fate, and a more sublime wit than mine to write his praise, yet I hope the reputation of my pen is considerable enough to make his glorious name survive all the ages, with that of the brave, the beautiful, and constant Imoinda."[113]

Oroonoko is an example of a story that assumes on an African perspective, offering no compromise when it comes to describing the brutality and painful reality of slavery. Both Oroonoko and Imoinda have to accept Christian names in Surinam, respectively Caesar and Clemene. Though they are united, they cannot become an authentic couple. The book might have ended with their happy reunion, but slavery turned people into property, and Imoinda and Oroonoko did not have the freedom to make their own decisions. Therefore, unless they escaped slavery, there would be no happy conclusion.

On another note, *Oroonoko* has all the elements of the reformer's perspective. It discusses the cruel reality of slavery, it features a slave petitioning for his freedom, and it gives another example of the trickery of English captains. The interesting and unique element of this work is the character, Imoinda, who represents the contradictory symbol many travelers and planters

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[113] Ibid., 91

discussed in their works. She is beautiful but black, and striking but modest. Chedgzoy argues, "Unable to narrate her own story, Imoinda's memories of the African past and of her life in slavery are occluded, and her body is appropriate as a site of memory both of her husband, and for the fiction as a whole."[114] Her body is often a describable point for many characters, but her emotions are also expressed. This was also the first time in a literary work that a female slave is portrayed as fearful of pregnancy. It was often a given that female slaves were also reproductive tools, but Imoinda saw the baby as hers and not as property. She would rather have died than produce more slaves. She could thus be seen as a victim because she could not stop the lusty reactions of men, but she also had power to voice her opinions. She chose Oroonoko as her beloved, she chose to trust that he would protect her, and in the end, she chose him to kill her.[115]

Focusing on Imoinda, Behn's portrayal of a female slave was unique yet familiar to early modern writers. The familiarity relates to the fact that Imoinda was emphasized physically, seen as beautiful and desirable by the European settlers. Yet the uniqueness of Behn's portrayal of Imoinda lay in her depiction of the complexity of Imoinda feelings. Imoinda has many emotions throughout the story. In Africa, she expresses love and hope to Oroonoko; while enslaved, she expresses desperation. Jacqueline Pearson writes, "There seems, indeed, always something ambiguous or paradoxical about female powerlessness for Behn's narrators: *Oroonoko's* Imoinda protects herself against assault from the Emperor and the slave-owners by simply revealing her vulnerability."[116] Though she is reunited with Oroonoko, she does not happily accept her situation. When she finds out that she is pregnant, she is anguished that another being will be forced into slavery. Throughout the story, she is logical about her situation; similar to Oroonoko, she

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[114] Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World,* 193

[115] Karen Bloom Gevirtz, *Women, the Novel, and Natual Philosophy, 1660-1727* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 39.

[116] Pearson, "Gender and Narrative," 180.

recognizes the falsity of the inhabitants on the island. She cannot forget that she was a slave and was not only married to Oroonoko; Imoinda was aware she had a master and she could not forget the cruelty of men. Like Oroonoko, she had her share of betrayal: the king betrayed her and sold her to slavery; as a slave, she was admired, but knew that admiration could not hide that she was property and could not dictate her own destiny. Finally, when she was pregnant, she knew that she could not trust that her master would keep her children with her. Though she is faced with tough circumstances, Imoinda has choices. She analyzes her situation and chooses to have her husband kill her. It is not about her death, but her decision to choose to die.

Conclusion

Most studies of early modern Barbados focus on men, and while there are a few studies of female slaves in Barbados, they limited to a few themes. This is understandable due to the lack of African sources in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century West Indies. Of all the inhabitants in Barbados, African women have the least primary sources, which creates difficulties when it comes to learning about their experiences. Most scholars focus on understanding slavery in general to gain insight into women's lives; however, most of these works focus on their jobs and lifestyles on the plantation, not realizing that these were organized and dominated by their plantation masters. Scholars need to focus instead on different perspectives and themes to fully understand women's circumstances. Hilary Beckles, a Barbadian historian, writes about the social and economic significance of Africans in the Caribbean, particularly focusing on Barbados and African women. He has written several works about slavery in the Caribbean, with two works specifically focusing on the lifestyles of slave women. One of his works, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados,* offers insight into black female lives from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Using Barbados as a case study, he seeks to "provide the historical evidence and insights necessary for a wider study of the socio-economic history of black women as labourers in the Caribbean."[117] Beckles' work illustrates that black women had many roles in slavery. They were laborers, sexual servants, rebels and matriarchs, woven into the culture and lifestyles of the island. Beckles has been an important source for this thesis because he provides a significant framework in arguing that African women were the center of slave relations and Barbadian

[117] Beckles, *Natural Rebels,* 1.

society.[118] This argument is also essential because it unlocks the possibility that different people were affected by African women; therefore these people's perspectives can provide knowledge and insight into their lives.

This thesis has attempted to examine African women through three particular perspectives. Though the perspectives are not directly from women, the sources are significant because they create a more three-dimensional viewpoint of African women. The first perspective examined came from travelers, whose viewpoints were based on many eyewitness experiences. Travel writers, epitomized by Richard Ligon, were preoccupied with female slaves, especially their bodies and appearances. Since such writings often comprised the sole English source of information for the outside world, they set the template for the representation of African women. Contributing to what would become a stereotype, travel writings viewed Barbadian women as sexual and physical objects with little insight into what they could personally offer.

Another perspective in this thesis was that of planters, who were important because they dictated the rules for African women. In studying their perspective, one sees that African women become less one-dimensional and are able to make their own decision, including rebelling, being loyal to their masters or accepting the Christian faith. On the other hand, such writings also confirm that female slaves suffered under slavery and were often isolated. One sees this in the final group of writings that fall under the perspective of the reformers who championed for social rights. Reformers emphasized that female slaves focused on their spiritual and social selves, promoting humanity among them. These three perspectives thus contribute to creating a more three dimensional viewpoint of African women, allowing us to learn about their

[118] Ibid., 2-23.

lifestyles, how they were viewed in a patriarchal society, and the extent of their independence and nature of their values and the agency they exercised.

There are other potential approaches to viewing female slaves, however. For instance, more research should be conducted on issues of female reproduction and sexuality, beyond that of a planter's point of view. In the early modern period, planters were not interested in reproducing to create more slaves; instead they chose to buy their slaves. If a woman gave birth, her children became the planter's property to be used as he saw fit. It is also proven that female slaves during the early modern period had low birth rates. It would be insightful to learn how female slaves reacted to these conditions.

In addition, there have been many works about planters desiring slaves, but little about what female slaves wanted. It would be interesting to research if and how female slaves desired planters and/or African males, and how they handled pregnancies and child rearing, and the conflicts which could result. There is evidence of prostitution among female slaves that were organized by planters. It would be interesting to learn about the circumstances connected to these female slaves. There is also evidence of planters reversing their practices in the late eighteenth century, when they focused on creating laws that benefitted pregnancies, giving reprieve when the woman reached five months of pregnancy. This change would affect African slaves, altering their rituals and traditions—a subject that would merit interesting research.

Another approach for future study might focus on comparative history. Female slaves are an interesting topic on their own, but comparing them to other subjects could further explain their role in history. There are two approaches on which scholars could concentrate. The first approach is a comparative understanding of female slaves and white women in Barbados. Both lived in a patriarchal society and had to combat the harshness of Barbados, even if white women

were free and the head of the domestics, while female slaves were laborers who often had to follow their dictates. Gender often crossed borders of class and race, however. As Beckles argues, "There is still need for more research into the nature of work experiences, the relations between sex, work, and status, and the extent to which specific slave groups developed and expressed distinct identities and consciousness."[119] But this could be also be said for white women in Barbados. White women had different backgrounds; some worked side by side with female slaves as servants in the home, while others were lucky to become the mistresses of the plantation. There were single white females who interacted with slaves on many occasions, including trying to convert them to Christianity and helping them escape slavery. The differing relationships would be a rich topic of study.

Another approach could be to compare female slaves from different West Indian colonies. It is a given that every situation is different according to its geographical, social, or historical context. Therefore, female slaves in Barbados would have a different experience if they were in English Jamaica or in a Dutch colony. There might be fruitful scholarship relating to female slaves in different geographical locations, perhaps centered on one theme. For example, it would be interesting to study reproduction among female slaves in Barbados or Jamaica. One source that could be mined in this regard is visual material or art. One example that features African-Caribbean women is the painting *Plechtigheid Onder de Neege* (1706) by Dirk Valkenburgh. In this painting, Africans are gathered on an island in a recreational setting. Most are engaged in conversation as some African men play the drums. The noteworthy aspect of the portrait resides in the nakedness of the slaves; the men and women have loincloths, while

[119] Hilary Beckles, "Black Female Slaves and White Households in Barbados," in *Black Women and Slavery in the Americas: More Than Chattel,* ed. David Barry Gaspar & Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 112.

the women's' breasts are exposed. The painting also depicts little or no shame on the part of the African women; they are naked but they are not concerned as they engage in conversation. There is also a depiction of promiscuity, with one couple openly kissing in a group setting. Focusing on that couple, there is a baby on the back of the kissing woman, possibly showing a lack of morality. There is also a simplicity that depicts the slaves as primitive, basic; almost animalistic with their lack of clothes, including no shoes-- though this could also refer to the tale of Adam and Eve who were naked until they found knowledge. Valkenburgh's is thus an interesting piece that symbolizes the racist and stereotypical viewpoints of African slaves, and could be compared with English artwork that also features Africans. Such an endeavor would help scholars learn more about the images that surrounded slave women and how these images affected judgments and played into stereotypes.

History is full of alternative lives, lived by different people who affect culture and society. It is important that we unburied them, bringing their significance to light. Female slaves were the center of the slave society, interacting with members of other races and classes. When we ignore them in historical research, we make a prominent group invisible. We deny their contributions and remain ignorant of their influence. It is important to therefore look to other sources, to allow secondary characters a platform to illustrate their significance in history.

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