THE ILL-TREATMENT OF THEIR COUNTRYWOMAN: LIBERATED AFRICAN
WOMEN, VIOLENCE, AND POWER IN TORTOLA, 1807-1834

A Thesis
presented to
the Faculty of California Polytechnic State University,
San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in History

by
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June 2021
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ABSTRACT

The Ill-Treatment of Their Countrywoman: Liberated African Women, Violence, and Power in Tortola, 1807-1834

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In 1807, Parliament passed an Act to abolish the slave trade, leading to the Royal Navy’s campaign of policing international waters and seizing ships suspected of illegal trading. As the Royal Navy captured slave ships as prizes of war and condemned enslaved Africans to Vice-Admiralty courts, formerly enslaved Africans became “captured negroes” or “liberated Africans,” making the subjects in the British colonies. This work, which takes a microhistorical approach to investigate the everyday experiences of liberated Africans in Tortola during the early nineteenth century, focuses on the violent conditions of liberated African women, demonstrating that abolition consisted of violent contradictions that mirrored slavery.

Keywords: abolition, slavery, liberated Africans, imperialism, women.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout researching and writing, I often felt as though this would be impossible to finish. Adam, thank you for constantly being that positive voice that drives out my self-doubt. Thank you for all the late nights you spent proofreading my work. Thank you for all the early morning trips to Starbucks and, and most of all, thank you for bringing balance to my life and reminding me to take breaks and not always be so serious. I love you, and this would not be possible without you. I also want to thank my family for allowing me and all my books to take over the house. Thank you for listening to me ramble on and on about history. Special thanks to my friends who are so patient—this is why I have been missing in action. To my cohort, Gina Lyle, Julie Zafiratos, and Kailyn Pope, this thesis really could not have been done without the support and encouragement of you all. Thank you for the late-night Zoom “accountability sessions,” proofreading, laughs, and encouragement. Doing this during a pandemic has been beyond difficult but having you all every step of the way made it truly memorable. To my committee, I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity to work with each of you. Dr. Morris, thank you for your constant support and for reminding me that I can do this. Dr. Hopper, thank you for all the encouragement, priceless feedback, mentorship, and time spent helping find sources and materials. Dr. Jackson, you do not know how much I appreciate our Zoom chats! Thank you for your amazing scholarly insight, advice, and support. Lastly, this work is dedicated to my grandmother, Floretta Eleanor Pryce-Browne. Thank you for demonstrating and instilling hard work and perseverance in your children and grandchildren. This work is done in your memory.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Royal Navy and Prize Courts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and Slavery</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of Research</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. THE VENUS HAVANNERA</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Initial Voyage</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Trade</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cargo</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Passage</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condemnation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ADMINISTRATIVE VIOLENCE</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18th and 19th) Century Intra-Imperial Conflict &amp; The Case of Arthur Hodge</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Royal Commission of Inquiry</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SOCIO-RACIAL AND GENDER HIERARCHIES</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Freedom</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inverted Levels of Power</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. GEOGRAPHIES OF CONTROL</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Life, Domesticity, and Sexual Violence</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Architectures of Control”</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveillance</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography &amp; Consulted Works</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “The Slave-Schooner at Port Royal”</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “Metal Branding Irons with Owners’ Initials”</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “Branding Slaves”</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. “Diagram of the Decks of a Slave Ship, 1814”</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “The Virgin Islands: accompanying the Report of Major Moody, on the state of the liberated Africans in Tortola, and the neighboring Keys (1826)”</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

“Am I not a man and a brother?” a phrase, in 1787, the British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade inscribed and printed on brass medallions and pamphlets. Along with this quote laid the image of an enslaved man kneeling while covered in chains, pleading for freedom.\(^1\) When thinking of abolition, it is easy to envision it in a vacuum, where slavery, arguably the most shameful stain on human history, came to an end through the progress and efforts of European governments and abolitionist societies. However, abolition in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was complex as the convergence between moral beliefs and political opportunity created a system that complicated anti-slavery.\(^2\) The idea of emancipation, freedom, liberation, and abolition did not translate to equality and self-autonomy for Africans and people of African descent. Instead, abolition was a site of struggle and full of contradictions that manifested in colonization, white supremacy, and violence.

On March 25, 1807, Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act, prohibiting “the African slave trade, and all manner of dealing and trading in the Purchase, Sale, Barter, or Transfer of Slaves, or of Persons intended to be sold, transferred, used, or dealt with as Slaves, practiced or carried on, in, at, to or from any Part of the Coast or Countries of Africa.”\(^3\) To enforce the Act, Britain employed its Royal Navy on a campaign to police international waters to stop the maritime trafficking of African slaves, as abolitionists in

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\(^3\) 47º Georgii III, Session 1, cap. XXXVI, An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.
London hoped the Slave Trade Act would weaken slavery in the West Indies.4 Throughout the early nineteenth century, Britain’s Vice-Admiralty courts condemned ships suspected of illegally transporting enslaved Africans, and crews who caught slave vessels were awarded prize money from the British government, allowing the profiting of slavery.5 By 1817, Britain entered bilateral agreements with European powers, which allowed for an increase in seizing slave vessels, and allowed Britain to maintain its hegemonic presence within international waters.6 The judicial process that condemned slave ships and “cargo” on board to the Royal Crown resulted in the lengthy indentures for captured Africans, also referred to as “captured negroes” or “liberated Africans.”7 The prize system and imperialistic attitudes of the Royal courts influenced the quality of life, or lack thereof, for liberated Africans. The majority of liberated African men, women, and children did not experience actual freedom; instead, their lives mirrored the harsh conditions of slavery.8 Thus, by centering on the lives of Africans and investigating what it meant to be a “liberated African,” the contradictory nature of abolition and anti-slavery becomes clear.

This work examines the experiences of liberated African women in Tortola throughout the 1810s and 1820s. Focusing on the life of one woman, named Ariange,

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5 Scanlan, “The Rewards of Their Exertions,” 114.
8 Anderson and Lovejoy, eds., Liberated Africans, 4.
who came to Tortola on board the Spanish Schooner *Venus Havannera*, caught in the Caribbean by the *HMS Barbadoes* in 1814, this research examines her violent experiences with colonial officials, her employers, and the environment around her. Ariange’s image in colonial documents is limited yet consumed with violence. Historiographically, there has been brief mention of Ariange. Sean Kelley’s chapter “The ‘Captured Negroes’ of Tortola, 1807-1822” in the edited volume *Liberated Africans* describes Ariange as “the worst instance” of violence in the British West Indies, in which he describes how the Commissioner found her hanging by her wrists to a cross beam and being severely whipped. Kelley’s mention of Ariange demonstrates the levels of mistreatment (hers being the worst); unfortunately, it portrays her as battered and beaten, leaving little nuance into her life and humanity. Therefore, this work seeks to examine her gendered experiences as a liberated African by confronting scenes of violence that significantly defined her life.

With the expansion of British imperialism in the early nineteenth century, Ariange and other liberated Africans who arrived in the West Indies experienced a unique time period in Atlantic history. In the midst of the abolition of the slave trade, imperialism, and legal slavery, liberated Africans navigated a society where “freedom” and “privilege” meant having dependents. Although abolitionists in London sought to limit slavery in the West Indies by passing the Slave Trade Act, abolition created a system where liberated Africans became dependent on state officials. While Tortola’s planting class was declining in the nineteenth century, the expansion of the British Empire created a system where liberated Africans were dependent on the master and imperial authority. Like other

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liberated Africans in the Caribbean, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and the Indian Ocean, Ariange’s “liberated” status mirrored enslavement and subjugation.

The Royal Navy and Prize Courts

To understand the experiences of liberated Africans, it is necessary to contextualize the legal process that shaped their lives. Padraic Scanlan’s work, “The Rewards of their Exertions: Prize Money and British Abolitionism in Sierra Leone, 1808-1823,” argues that the Vice-Admiralty courts, which were the first courts to adjudicate slave ships, did very little to help or care for liberated Africans. Vice-Admiralty courts and courts of Mixed Commissions in the nineteenth century were to provide humanitarian interventions; however, Scanlan argues that the prize system stifled humanitarian intentions. Scanlan further argues that the prize system, which turned “captured negroes” into “liberated Africans,” reflected the transition of property from a slave trader’s vessel to the property of the Crown.\textsuperscript{10} The legal mechanisms in support of abolition gave colonial officials the authority to control liberated Africans, whether that meant enlisting them in the military, coercing them into manual labor, or placing them into apprenticeships, making them “imagined property.” Therefore, free or emancipated status was undetached from the productive use of Africans. Scanlan argues that the commodification of liberated Africans by British courts, “bodies animated by others,”\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} See Ian Baucom, \textit{Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History} (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), popular within the historiography, especially his argument that the trans-Atlantic slave trade set a standard of how Africans were to be treated “not only as if they were a type of commodity, but as a flexible, negotiable, transactable form of money” (61-2).

\textsuperscript{11} Scanlan relies on Stephanie E. Smallwood, \textit{Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), where she argues the trans-Atlantic slave trade commodified human bodies, making “bodies animated by other.” Scanlan applies this to the condemning of Africans upon slave vessels, highlighting the transfer of “property” within Britain’s court system.
reflects both slave traders and British courts’ shared analogy between people and goods.\(^{12}\)

Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford’s work *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law 1800-1850* critiques the contradictions of British abolitionism, similarly to Scanlan; however, Benton and Ford draw attention to Britain’s imperial motivations, which they argue shaped Britain’s ability to police international waters. Benton and Ford argue that the creation of Mixed Commission courts in the first two decades of the nineteenth century allowed Britain to maintain its “search and seizure” wartime policies without going to war. According to Benton and Ford, since Britain could not force foreign countries to abide by their domestic laws and legally could not board or seize foreign slave ships, creating bilateral treaties with other European powers allowed Britain to enforce abolition and maintain its hegemony. During the Napoleonic Wars, most cases were held in the Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola; however, after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the courts of Mixed Commission replaced the Admiralty courts and expanded anti-slavery.\(^{13}\) Mixed Commission courts received the support of abolitionists in London, but it also expanded the prize system. Although the Courts of Mixed Commissions increased rapidly throughout the 1820s and 1830, the Royal Navy seized 95 percent of illegal slave ships throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, securing its international authority.\(^{14}\)

Benton, Ford, and Scanlan compellingly demonstrate the imbalances and legal contradictions of abolition. Although their works don’t detail personal histories of

\(^{12}\) Scanlan, “The Rewards of Their Exertions,” 115, 118-120. See also Michael Craton, “The Role of the Caribbean Vice admiralty Courts in British Imperialism,” where he discusses the commodification of Africans by the Vice Admiralty Courts.

\(^{13}\) Anderson and Lovejoy, eds., *Liberated Africans*, 8.

liberated Africans, their attention to the prize system and imperial motivations behind abolition are integral to understanding the system that colonized liberated Africans. Richard Huzzey’s *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* argues along similar lines to Benton and Ford, positing that Britain’s imperialistic attitudes deterred equality and freedom for Africans. Huzzey argues that anti-slavery after emancipation in 1834 was nothing but opportunistic for the British Empire.15 British officials in the West Indies resented that they had to support liberated Africans; therefore, indentured contracts supplemented the cost of “saving” Africans while supplying labor to the sugar colonies who were facing economic decline by the 1830s.16 Huzzey makes another critical argument; anti-slavery did not lessen racism or promote equality; instead, racism became systemic with the implementation of anti-slavery policy. Black West Indians, liberated or formerly enslaved, worked low-wage jobs and suffered from unemployment, which in most British islands were illegal, criminalizing them under vagrancy laws. Anti-slavery was a constant contradiction; by 1834, emancipated Blacks, as Scanlan argues, were “imagined” as the “servile race” or property.17 Huzzey’s argument is integral to grasping post-emancipation societies, reinforcing that emancipation did not eliminate prejudices or domination. Further, considering anti-slavery policies before emancipation, there is a pattern throughout the British Empire where they conceptualized “free” black bodies as laborious and commodifiable.

Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896, edited by Richard Anderson and Henry Lovejoy, is a vast body of work that brings together experts of the Caribbean, Africa, and the Indian Ocean to explore the regionally unique experiences of liberated Africans. Liberated Africans moves away from the traditional historiography of abolition and anti-slavery, which predominantly focused on policy rather than people. It relies on the arguments of Scanlan, Benton, Ford, and Huzzey, arguing that “the legal process through which captives on board slave ships became liberated Africans was simultaneously an act of emancipation and colonization.”

Although liberated African women are historiographically underrepresented, the chapter “Household Labor and Sexual Coercion: Reconstructing Women’s Experience of African Recaptive Settlement,” written by Laura Rosanne Adderley, examines liberated African women in Antigua and Tortola’s experiences with domestic labor and sexual violence. Harking back to Huzzey, Adderley argues that British colonial expectations of African’s “servile” bodies assisting white employers was the essence of “civilizing” and converting Africans to Western social norms. Adderley argues that this impacted gendered and racial understandings of labor. Like enslaved women, liberated African women became subject to sexual coercion within the workplace, often marrying and having children with their employers. Building on Adderley’s research, this work interrogates how urban and

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19 Anderson and Lovejoy, eds., Liberated Africans, 4.

semi-urban slave societies influenced the gendered and racial divisions of labor, which impact the mobility of liberated Africans like Ariange.

**Gender and Slavery**

To understand the unique experiences of liberated African women, the gendered implications of British colonial societies like Tortola, an active slave society, must be critically taken into account.\(^{21}\) Historiographically, there has been little focus on the experiences of liberated African women; however, works on gender and slavery in the Atlantic world are integral when investigating how liberated African women navigated colonial life. Considering that Ariange’s appearance in the archival record is violent, Saidiya Hartman’s work “Venus in two Acts” focuses on the violent images of enslaved women that serve a “death sentence” in the historical record. Hartman begs the question, “how does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?”\(^{22}\) Like the photographs of Emmett Till’s beaten face, Hartman states that images of enslaved women logged in slave records portray their dishonored condition. Can historians liberate women from archival scenes of subjection? According to Hartman, undoing the violence that introduces enslaved women to the archive is impossible; however, Hartman suggests that there is meaning to revisiting scenes of violence. Then, how was Ariange’s scene of subjection more than an example of “the

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\(^{21}\) It is important to note that there is a difference between “slave societies” and “societies with slaves,” or settlements that do not depend on slave-labor industries. “Slave societies” are composed of a majority enslaved population, and slave-dependent industries like sugar, cotton, and coffee. Hence, slave societies are uniquely repressive and the political, social, and spatial structures in place dominate the large non-white population. For liberated Africans in the British West Indies, the characteristics of slave societies informed their experience with violence and freedom. See Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) for a more nuanced study on the complex differentiations of slavery in the Atlantic.

worst instance” of mistreatment? How do we consider her violent condition without reaffirming archival silences and distortion? What does violence tell us about her humanity, and can we reimagine the history of enslaved people beyond the typical idea of black suffering?

Marisa J. Fuentes’s *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* constructs historical accounts through the perspective of enslaved women in Bridgetown, Barbados. Fuentes relies on the archival fragmentation of enslaved women to provide a nuanced understanding of their experiences. She argues that “violence pervades the archive;” therefore, Fuentes posits that there is meaning in reconstructing the violence endured by enslaved women. Focusing on the violent or exploitative way enslaved women appear, “mutilated historicity” demonstrates how enslaved women experienced colonial power and how they resisted oppression. As Fuentes suggests, the violated way in which enslaved women appear in archival records reflects the systems of power they experienced, making them historical. One of the most compelling parts of Fuentes’s work is the idea of “body memory,” which she explains that scars inflicted by violence, brandings, and country marks were signifiers of “unfreedom, confirming their social status.” “Body memory” is significant to work on liberated Africans as colonial documents detail the heights, ages, and physical descriptions of Africans during the process of adjudication. The documentation of body marks for liberated Africans were forms of evidence to collect prize money and surveil their movements throughout their apprenticeships. How colonial society read and recorded their physical descriptions

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provided insight into the colonial landscapes liberated Africans experienced and impacted.

Studies on gender and slavery, like *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* by Jessica Marie Johnson critically interrogates the complexities and contradictions of Black women’s struggles for freedom, challenging stereotypical ideas of the “breeder slave woman.” Johnson’s work focuses on free women from Senegal’s coast to New Orleans and their strategic actions (although not always successful) to distance themselves from slavery. Johnson makes the critical point, “free status did not define freedom” in a world that built upon the commodification and domination of Black women’s flesh. Johnson discusses the concept of “aesthetics and embodiment of freedom,” which she defines as the intentional use of materials and practices that symbolize freedom. For example, free women would wear European-style clothing or jewelry to reinforce their status. Free women would forge intimate ties with slave traders and give their children European names. Johnson posits that “the freedom that black women practiced was murky, messy, and contingent.” However, free women were not simply victims of violence and coercion; they also tested colonial society’s bounds, constantly redefining freedom and power. Johnson’s focus on power as “negotiable” is essential to research on liberated African women, considering their

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26 Sugar colonies in the Atlantic have depended on the Black women’s body since the 17th century when the French passed *Code Noir* (1685), which was the first comprehensive Slave Code passed in the Americas. It harnessed the body of Black women, gaining success and expanding empires off of Black women’s reproduction. Free women had to navigate freedom in a world that functioned off of gendering flesh.
experiences in colonial society consisted of more than linear forms of domination; they actively engaged and opposed objectification.

**Structure of Research**

In succession to this introduction, Chapter Two, “The Venus Havannera,” provides a detailed account of the Spanish slave ship that Ariange arrived on board to Tortola in 1814. It begins with the purchase of the vessel by Spanish merchants and ends with the capture and condemnation of the ship by the Royal Navy and Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola. This chapter demonstrates how liberated Africans’ judicial process of emancipation acted as a transfer of property from Spanish slavers to British Admiralty courts. This chapter also demonstrates how the process of the slave trade that turned human bodies into commodifiable “flesh” created a genealogy of violence that informed the everyday lives of liberated Africans in Tortola.

Chapter Three, “Administrative Violence,” explores the legal and political factors that allowed for cases of mistreatment and abuse. Ariange’s case of abuse by her employers, recorded by the Royal Commission of Inquiry, is at the center of this chapter. This chapter asks the question of how and why did colonial officials, who were responsible for the well-being of liberated Africans, did not intervene when apprentices were suffering from mistreatment?

Chapter Four, “Socio-Racial and Gender Hierarchies,” focuses on the abusive relationship between Ariange and her employer Rebecca Rymer, a free woman of mixed race. This chapter investigates the social hierarchies in Tortola by examining Black Codes in the British Virgin Islands and black freedom struggles. By paying critical attention to the oppressed disposition of free blacks, this chapter demonstrates that
liberated Africans, like Ariange, entered a complex social structure that was violent and turbulent.

Chapter Five, “Geographies of Control,” analyzes Ariange’s relationship with the urban landscape around her. This chapter explores how geography informed her employment, which exposed women like her to sexual violence and exploitation; this chapter also focuses on structural symbols of power in port-cities and how they informed her mobility and confinement. Lastly, this chapter investigates counter-geographies by explicitly focusing on her nine-month escape from her employer.

As research on British and global anti-slavery is increasingly focusing on the lives and experiences of liberated Africans, it is essential to center the experiences of women, who unfortunately gain little historiographic attention. For liberated African women, like Ariange, who entered colonial slave societies as “liberated,” escaping from the gender and racial confines of the Atlantic world was arduous. Liberated Africans’ experiences with enslavement and slavery as an institution demonstrate the contradictions of British anti-slavery policy. By paying attention to moments of violence as a tool to reconsider the distorted images of liberated African women like Ariange, their lives become nuanced and vital to discussions on British abolition and slavery in the West Indies.
Chapter Two

THE VENUS HAVANNERA

By the early nineteenth century, slave trading was one the most profitable industries throughout the world. International networks of merchant capitalists, sailors, and slave owners, looking to increase profits in the sugar, cotton, and coffee industry, were not seizing their trade activity due to the Napoleonic wars and abolition in the United States and Great Britain. However, as Britain persevered to sway other European empires to abolish the trade, the Royal Navy and Admiralty courts took advantage of the wartime era to assert their international dominance by capturing and condemning foreign slave ships and their cargo, including enslaved Africans, as prizes of war. For Ariange and the other Africans on board the Venus Havannera, their experience with the slave trade and the Royal Navy’s anti-slavery campaign would define their experiences in the British colonies. Tracking the voyage of the Venus Havannera and the brutalities of the slave trade, to its interception by the Royal Navy and condemnation by the Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola, this chapter demonstrates that the commodification of Africans aboard persisted under British authority.

The Initial Voyage

The Venus Havannera was a 180-ton English-built two-mast schooner, purchased by Jose Mathias de Acebal, a Spanish merchant in Havana on June 12, 1812. Upon purchasing the 12-gun vessel, Acebal registered the Venus Havannera for her first voyage on July 17, 1812, which lasted until her capture by the Royal Navy precisely two years later, on July 17, 1814. Initially bound for Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the Venus Havannera set sail on July 18, 1812, carrying over 60 bags of white sugar, 90 bags of
coffee, 69 pipes of rum, and 19 barrels of rum.\(^1\) According to Acebal’s account seized from the ship, the *Venus Havannera* was to deliver goods to sell on consignment in Buenos Aires and Montevideo. However, when reaching Rio de Janeiro, the captain received news of besiegement in Montevideo and Buenos Aires due to an insurrection;\(^2\) therefore, the *Venus Havannera* could not safely access the ports. Upon receiving the news, Acebal consigned the goods on his ship to a Portuguese trading company, Dias Viuva & Co., where they coordinated trade with the ship’s captain, on his account.\(^3\)

Merchants, financiers, and trading companies combined funded the voyages of trading vessels. Their large professional networks allowed for consistent communication, allowing all parties to manage their investments and direct commanders and sailors to alter voyages that protect their financial interests. When learning of the news of the insurgency in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, Dias Viuva & Co. organized for the goods on board the *Venus Havannera* to sail to Buenos Aires and Montevideo on smaller vessels accompanied by Portuguese warships. In October of 1812, Dias Viuva & Co. notified Acebal in Havana that the goods were lost and that the trading company could attain new goods in which the *Venus Havannera* could barter in exchange for African slaves. In agreement with Dias Viuva & Co.’s suggestion to trade in Africa on Acebal’s account and risk, the trading company in Rio supplied the ship’s captain with a

“[sufficient] amount of goods in which he could barter for 450 to 500 Africans.”\(^4\)

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\(^1\) The National Archives (TNA), Kew, United Kingdom, High Court of Admiralty (HCA) 45/70/10, 12.

\(^2\) TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 2. There is not specific indication of the type of insurrection taking place in Buenos Aires during July of 1812; however, it is probable that the Argentine War of Independence, which lasted from 1810 to 1818, could have informed the *Venus Havannera*’s voyage into the port of Buenos Aires.

\(^3\) TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 2-3.

\(^4\) TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 2.
shared goal to gain capital by international financiers and seamen who carried out the
slave voyages was both an intricate and violent system that required all parties’ full
participation.⁵

Jose Sousa Teixera, captain of the Venus Havannera and Spanish subject, lived
most of his life between Spain, Cuba, and Rio de Janeiro. Teixera was a reputable
captain; however, he was inexperienced in the African trade. Slave masters had an
immense amount of responsibility, they had to maintain the order of the ship and the
crew, and they were responsible for negotiating purchasing prices of slaves with African
traders and conducting the business of financiers while accepting all the risks and dangers
of the sea.⁶ While learning of the change, Acebal and Dias Viuva & Co. employed Franco
Marcos de Jesus, a ship surgeon with experience in the African trade, to assist Teixera in
purchasing and maintaining slaves.⁷ Aside from the captain, surgeons had one of the
essential roles on board. The surgeon’s opinions of the health of slaves guided the
decision of captains; further, they were responsible for monitoring the health of enslaved
people throughout the Middle Passage.⁸ By the nineteenth century, all slave ships carried
surgeons. Surgeons and captains were motivated to keep mortality rates low as they
received bonuses for protecting the “cargo.”⁹ In addition to hiring a knowledgeable
surgeon to assist Teixera in the purchasing of slaves on the African coast, Dias Viuva &
Co. also arranged for the Venus Havannera to sail alongside the Portuguese schooner

⁵ Sowande’ Mustakeem, Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage
(Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 21-24. See also Marcus Rediker, Between the Devil
and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World,
⁶ Peter Grindal, Opposing the Slavers: The Royal Navy’s Campaign against the Atlantic Slave
⁷ TNA, HCA 45/70/10.
⁸ Grindal, Opposing the Slavers, 43-44. Mustakeem, Slavery at Sea, 37-38.
Manuella whose captain, Jose Joaquin de Meyrelles, was also experienced in the African trade and could advise Teixera on trading. The success of the Venus Havannera’s voyage relied on the provisioning of healthy Africans, which depended upon the trilateral relationships between merchants, trading companies, and middlemen.

Besides Teixera and the surgeon, the Venus Havannera had a crew of 33 to 35 men, boys, and bondsmen. Due to the harsh conditions of the maritime slave trade, there were ongoing job opportunities for seamen. Slave trading had a nasty reputation; when ships entered ports, they carried the most unsavory smells, sailors typically suffered from alcoholism, encouraging unpopular judgments of their work. The majority of crew members were low-wage workers whose jobs were undesirable and placed their lives at considerable risk. Upon being hired on a slave ship, captains and their crew joined the hierarchical structure of slave trading. Becoming middlemen placed slave traders responsible for meeting employers’ expectations by agreeing to withstand seafaring and slaving. Although maritime slaving was lowly, filthy, and low-paying, middlemen enabled the growth of plantation economies, and their role in the slave trade was the first step in enslaving Africans in the Americas.

In the early nineteenth century, the demand for slave labor in Cuba and Brazil was excessively high as the sugar and coffee industry increased its reliance on slaves to meet economic demands. By 1807, Spain steadily relied on slave labor more than other

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10 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 3-4.
11 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 29.
12 Mustakeem, Slavery at Sea, 22.
13 For a detailed analysis on low-wage seamen, captains and merchants’ relationships and trade operations see Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea.
15 Grindal, Opposing the Slavers, 104.
colonies in the Americas, including Brazil. Both the European mainland and the United States relied heavily on Cuba’s sugarcane production, in turn, expanding Cuba’s slave market. The rising cotton industry in the United States increased American slavers’ demand for slave labor, motivating them to penetrate Cuba’s slave market. Within nine months of 1807, 35 of 37 slave ships entering Havana were American ships.\textsuperscript{16} A new generation of Spanish merchants like Jose Mathias de Acebal, well aware of growing restrictions placed upon the slave trade in the United States and Great Britain, sought to extract as many slaves from Africa in the least amount of time. From 1790 to 1810, slave ships transported roughly 150,000 Africans into Cuba and 200,000 into Brazil.\textsuperscript{17}

On November 10, 1813, Dias Viuva & Co. provided Jose Sousa Teixera with “21 bales of goods, 5 cafes, 7 pipes of rum, 3,000 horns, 246 iron bars, three coppers, seven barrels containing 700 lbs. of gunpowder” to use to purchase African in Bonny.\textsuperscript{18} Traders understood that bartering items like gunpowder and horns were essential to the purchasing of African labor. In 1790, British slavers exported over 2 million lbs. of gunpowder to West Africa. Brazilian brandy had strong buying power, and traders often carried generous quantities on board their ships when sailing to Africa’s coast.\textsuperscript{19} By providing African slavers with valuable goods like rum and gunpowder, European traders negotiated in return for “prime” Africans who they could transport back to the Americas to partake in the sugar and coffee industry, enriching European slave-dependent economies like Cuba and Brazil.

\textsuperscript{16} Grindal, \textit{Opposing the Slavers}, 105.  
\textsuperscript{17} Grindal, \textit{Opposing the Slavers}, 38.  
\textsuperscript{18} TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 8.  
\textsuperscript{19} Grindal, \textit{Opposing the Slavers}, 102-103.
On November 23, 1813, the *Venus Havannera* left the port in Rio de Janeiro for the Bight of Biafra. The change of course from her maiden voyage not only forced Jose Mathias de Acebal, Dias Viuva & Co., and Jose Sousa Teixera to re-strategize and adapt to the conditions of maritime trade, but it transformed the lives of 530 Africans placed aboard the ship in 1814. Sailing in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars and during the beginning of Britain’s anti-slavery campaign, Africans on board experienced devastating and chaotic conditions, from their first interactions with the crewmembers of the *Venus Havannera* to their lives as English subjects in the British West Indies. The initial voyage of the *Venus Havannera* and her change in route to purchase African captives was the start of a longer story of colonialism and anti-slavery.

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20 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 4.
African Trade

On February 18, 1814, the Venus Havannera sailed into Bonny’s port to barter goods from Rio de Janeiro, supplied by Spanish and Portuguese merchants for 450 to 500 Africans, who were to be transported to the port in Havana. How Africans came to be transported and sold on West Africa’s coastline varied by regional political and social circumstances. African warfare, kidnappings, and local feuds impacted the captivity, sale, and transportation of Africans into European slavers’ possession. However, African men, women, and children forced onto European ships reflect the trilateral relationships between European financiers, sailors, and African traders, where enslaved Africans remained at the center of their negotiations.

Upon arriving in Bonny, Jose Sousa Teixera noted that “there were no factories no white persons resident at [Bonny],” indicating that their trade interactions predominantly took place with Africans, rather than other Europeans or people of mixed-race. In all trading regions of Africa, “factories” or “barracoons” and trading practices varied. In some regions like the Gold Coast in the eighteenth century, slave traders had factories on the shore, where brokers operated business with mixed-race and European shipmasters. However, Bonny predominantly relied on African traders carrying slaves from the inland region of Igboland to port on large canoes. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, when the British maintained a dominant presence in Bonny’s port, English vessels from Liverpool and Bristol relied on African traders to sail on average 20

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21 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 5.
23 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 6.
to 30 slaves at a time on canoes to the coast. Although in 1814, when the *Venus Havannera* entered into port, the English presence hardly existed; however, Bonny’s operations sustained because of the presence of Spanish and Portuguese vessels.\(^{25}\)

The Bight of Biafra became a port for slave-trading in the seventeenth century; however, its prominence in the 1730s as the development of the slave trade in Liverpool and Bristol sent English slavers to the Bonny in high numbers. Toward the late eighteenth century, Bonny became one of the leading slave-trading ports on the West African coastline, surpassing Elem Kalabari and Old Calabar.\(^{26}\) Abolition in 1807 led to a sharp decline in the number of slaves exported from the Bight of Biafra, but Spanish, Portuguese, and French vessels dominated the slave trade in Bonny within a decade. Although Bonny was in a swampy mangrove, infested with mosquitoes, hot and humid, and overall unhealthy for Europeans, it was geographically significant. Bonny’s position on the coast was crucial for slavers, as it was convenient for a quick turnaround, allowing Bonny to maintain its success as the leading supplier of slaves in 1841 when British forces actively seized trading in the region.\(^{27}\)

Overall, between 1660 to 1841, an estimated 1.5 million enslaved Africans sailed from Bonny.\(^{28}\)

Bonny’s ascendancy over Old Calabar and Elem Kalabari in the eighteenth and nineteenth century had to do with its political advantages, credit security, commercial efficiency, and impersonal exchange.\(^{29}\) A faction of the Arochukwu state, known as “Aro,” settled the Cross River, southeastern Nigeria, in 1733 along a 30-kilometer trade

\(^{25}\) Paul Lovejoy and David Richardson, “‘This Horrid Hole’: Royal Authority, Commerce and Credit at Bonny, 1690-1840,” *Journal of African History* 45 (2004), 381-382.

\(^{26}\) Lovejoy and Richardson, “‘This Horrid Hole,’” 366.

\(^{27}\) Lovejoy and Richardson, “‘This Horrid Hole,’” 365-367.

\(^{28}\) Lovejoy and Richardson, “‘This Horrid Hole,’” 368.

\(^{29}\) Lovejoy and Richardson, “‘This Horrid Hole,’” 372.
route connected to the Igbo country. Aro merchant-warlord groups quickly dominated the Bight of Biafra, and their trade networks rapidly increased the number of captives exported in the mid-eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{30} Their large settlements and expansionist policy relied on private enterprise and frequent warfare, many of which responded to the demand for slaves in the Atlantic. Rather than creating traditional formations, the Aro established trading centers where preexisting tribes and other merchant groups could pay tribute (typically with slaves) to remain on their land.\textsuperscript{31}

According a Parliamentary Papers report published in 1825 on the \textit{Return of the State and Condition of the Captured Negroes}, the 303 Africans condemned off the \textit{Venus Havannera} had “Ebo” and “Mocco” origins, which both the “Ebo” and “Mocco” share ethnic origins in the Igbo country.\textsuperscript{32} Motivated by profits and territorial expansion, Aro traders employed brute force to maintain control over the Igbo territory.\textsuperscript{33} Warfare was central to Aro control in Igboland during the nineteenth century as palm oil and slaves were the Igbo heartland’s major commodities.\textsuperscript{34} The majority of the conflict took place on the Cross River and upper Imo River, giving Aro merchants increased access to captives or gifts (slaves) from local allies.\textsuperscript{35} Aro dominance of the slave trade in the Igbo hinterland relied on its social and economic institutions. The Aro maintained strong kinship ties, which maintained their population and control of the Igbo region. Non-Aro

\textsuperscript{31} Nwokeji, \textit{The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra}, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Parliamentary Papers}, “Papers Relating to Captured Negroes,” 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25, 121.
\textsuperscript{34} Nwokeji, \textit{The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra}, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{35} Nwokeji, \textit{The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra}, 70.
communities relied on the Aro’s foreign goods from trading throughout the Bight of Biafra, opening themselves up to exploitation and dependency.\textsuperscript{36}

Although the Aro controlled the supply of African captives in Bonny, European demand in the eighteenth and nineteenth century intensified the means of procuring Africans.\textsuperscript{37} Like the majority of European traders in Bonny during the early nineteenth century, Jose Sousa Teixera and his crew relied on the political and commercial organization of Bonny to load their ships with the maximum number of bodies. Warrior groups in the Igbo country supplied high numbers of captives to Aro merchant houses, making prisoners of war the Bight of Biafra’s main export by the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{38} Cognizant of the value of gunpowder and iron in Bonny, due to the ongoing political, social, and cultural tensions, European traders stocked their ships with desired goods in the hope of purchasing “prime slaves.” Using the goods provided by Dias Viuva & Co., Jose Sousa Teixera and his crew used the exports on board as credit. On March 1, 1814, Jose Ignacio Pereira, the second mate on board the \textit{Venus Havannera}, signed a paper stating that “The Transaction of the ship \textit{Venus} owes [...] to King Peple, the following, 400 Bars of Iron, 3 Pipes of Rum, 400 Pounds of Gunpowder, the whole of which I promise to bring or fend him as soon as possible.”\textsuperscript{39} African warfare and the slave trade maintained a continuous and violent cycle, as African warfare supplied European slaves with captives, and in return, Europeans provided African groups with supplies.

\textsuperscript{36} Nwokeji, \textit{The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra}, 80.
\textsuperscript{37} Mustakeem, \textit{Slavery at Sea}, 33.
\textsuperscript{38} Nwokeji, \textit{The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra}, 127.
\textsuperscript{39} TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 6.
The political, social, and cultural dynamics in the Bight of Biafra had a profound impact on the slave trade. Aro dominance in the Igbo region supplied Europeans in the Americas with thousands of Africans for over a century, as continuous warfare among different ethnic groups provided prisoners of war for Aro merchants to sell. For Spanish and Portuguese vessels like the *Venus Havanerra*, they capitalized on the British’s absence between 1807 and 1841, negotiating with African traders for high numbers of captives to transport back to the Americas to fuel plantation economies. For Jose Sousa Teixera, who was inexperienced in the African trade, the inner-dynamics among African merchants and tribes were foreign. With the assistance of an experienced crew and Dias Viuva & Co., who understood the value of particular goods among Africans in Bonny, Sousa purchased African captives and transported them as goods to the Caribbean.

**Cargo**

Between February and May 1814, Jose Sousa Teixera and his crew purchased 530 Africans to transport back to Havana. Merchants, plantation owners, and sailors’ racialized, capitalistic, and patriarchal attitudes informed the selection and purchasing of enslaved Africans. Black bodies all carried some value to foreign buyers; it was the responsibility of middlemen to determine the valuable from the invaluable, requiring them to imagine the perfect laboring body. Commanders relied on standardized markers to determine and justify their purchases, many of which relied on invasive physical exams that played a consequential role in the dehumanization of Africans and the “manufacturing” of products. Upon purchasing Africans, Sousa and his crew branded and boarded their captives, defining their status as unfree.

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40 Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea*, 37. See also Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*.
Categorical differences guided European commanders and surgeons as they bargained and bought Africans. For traders, healthy slaves showed intelligence, physical strength, and had skills, whether in agriculture or domestic work. In most regions, European buyers preferred purchasing African men over women (and children) because Europeans thought men were well-suited for manual labor and better for productivity.\textsuperscript{41} Of the 303 captives who survived, 65.3\% were men, 16.2\% were women, and 18.5\% were children.\textsuperscript{42} Gender and age played an essential role in the purchasing of enslaved Africans. Traders and surgeons frequently avoided elderly Africans and infants because they had high mortality rates and required more care throughout the Middle Passage; successful transportation and avoiding unnecessary costs remained the priority for traders.\textsuperscript{43}

Surgeons were critically involved in the selection and purchasing of Africans. Franco Marcos de Jesus, the surgeon on board the \textit{Venus Havannera}, was responsible for physically examining African captives before Jose Sousa Teixera purchased or boarded them on the ship. It was common practice for surgeons to assess Africans’ health by inspecting the skin for rashes or small-pox symptoms to prevent infections on board the ship. Surgeons practiced more invasive physical examinations, inspecting the hair and teeth of Africans and the genitalia. Patriarchal and sexual factors influenced the physical

\textsuperscript{41} Nwokeji, \textit{The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra}, 147; It should be noted that the Bight of Biafra was the leading exporter in enslaved women from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Although men were preferable, by the nineteenth century, European and American slavers were overwhelmed by male captives’ high prices and willing to accept women laborers.

\textsuperscript{42} Slave Voyage ID: 41854 on \url{https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database}.

inspection of women and girls, prompting the examination of their breasts and genitalia to ensure their reproductive abilities. Those who passed the invasive scrutiny were bargained, paid for, and branded.

Since the seventeenth century, in Europe and the Americas, facial and bodily branding has been used to exclude groups of people, primarily Africans and people of African descent. Branding commodified the body and excluded it from society. For slave traders, branding was different from criminal branding in slave societies; it required registration with European states. There were specific techniques for branding skin and transformed the human body into a shippable commodity. The branding of enslaved Africans differentiates the liberated body from captive “flesh,” being the mangled, broken, and inhuman state of being, beginning on the African coast. In a single burn, branding one’s body with force dehumanized them and placed value on them, confining them to the binary of free or unfree, and always in proximity to enslavement.

Body marks like brandings, lacerations, mutilation all inscribed social meanings on those who carried them. While purchasing slaves in Bonny, Jose Sousa Teixera received a letter from Jose Joaquin Meyrelles, the captain of the Manuella, dated April 4, 1814, instructing Teixera that upon “[completing] the purchase of 450 slaves, [they] are

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45 Mustakeem, _Slavery at Sea_, 44-54.
49 Keefer, “Marked by Fire,” 659.
to be marked with the mark of the Cargo, A. on the left breast.”

For slave traders, branding and imposing violence upon enslaved people was essential to making a person property, and for Teixera, part of his duty was to transport “cargo” (450 to 500 Africans) to his employer Jose Mathias Acebal in Havana. Like the 530 captives on board the Venus Havannera, enslaved people were forcibly marked with the initials or pattern of trading companies or their enslavers, making them chattel.


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50 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 8.
51 Keefer, “Marked by Fire,” 660.
52 Keefer, “Marked by Fire,” 666.
Branding was not only degrading, but it was also excruciating, and in the worst cases, it was deadly if not done correctly. The process of branding was specific. Brands were read from top to bottom, from the outside to the inside of the body, and left to right. For the brand to permanently mark the skin, it had to be a temperature that would not burn the skin, nor could it be too cool, leaving a blister that would clear away. A correct brand would burn the hair and first layer of skin, allowing it to scab and leave a readable mark.\textsuperscript{53} Slavers used both silver and iron to brand enslaved people. Silver, having a melting point of $961^\circ\text{C}$, was less damaging on human skin, whereas iron typically caused hypertrophic and keloidal scarring due to its higher melting point of $1538^\circ\text{C}$.\textsuperscript{54} For Africans, brands left permanent physical and psychological scars. It signified the stripping of one’s autonomy and self-identity.

\textsuperscript{53} Keefer, “Marked by Fire,” 667-668.  
\textsuperscript{54} Keefer, “Marked by Fire,” 665.
The commodification, unmaking, and marking of enslaved people would have lifelong impacts. Selecting, examining, and branding enslaved people was one of the first moments they experienced chattel slavery. Transforming the human body into packageable and shippable flesh, Africans on board the *Venus Havannera* entered a new world where they would have to negotiate their freedoms continually. The “manufacturing” of enslaved Africans hurled them into Euro-American constructs of race, gender, and sex, in their interaction with Spanish sailors and British colonial life.

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The horror of being sold intensified as enslaved people boarded European vessels. The traumatizing conditions they confronted, like intense weather, disease, unsanitary conditions, physical brutality, food deprivation, and death, defined their captivity and commodification as a transportable good. For the *Venus Havannera*, the Middle Passage and the 120 lives lost throughout the voyage caught the attention of abolitionists in London, becoming examples to Parliament why the British government should employ more stringent means of ending the slave trade and actively forming treaties with foreign countries to restrict further trading.\(^{56}\) Documents seized aboard the ship detail the harshness of the Middle Passage for both the crew and captives. Outbreaks of disease, unrelenting climates, physical confinement, and psychological trauma further contributed to enslaved people’s dehumanization and the unmaking of their self-identities. The Middle Passage served as a seasoning period, where violence sought to transform human beings into quantifiable goods.\(^{57}\)

On May 31, 1814, an unsigned letter, which details indicate Jose Sousa Teixera probably wrote it to Dias Viuva & Co, details the crew and captives’ declining health onboard the *Venus Havannera*. The author of the letter informed the trading company that, “My health which I thought would improve on landing, has on the contrary always become worse; as yet I have not passed a single a day without fever, inconvenience, weariness, [etc.] which deprive me of all pleasure.” The letter tells the trading company that the first pilot, surgeon, boatswain, carpenter, seamen, and the surgeon are in the same

\(^{56}\) *PP*, “Papers relating to Slave Trade at Conferences in London and Aix-la-Chapelle,” 1819, (106) XVIII.427, no. 18, 21.

\(^{57}\) Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 72.
condition.\textsuperscript{58} When selecting Africans on the coast, merchants instructed the captains and crews to inspect the health, especially the skin of Africans, to check for any potential spreading of diseases. Even with the invasive inspection of African bodies, commanders could not control the ship’s health, even for themselves. Further, the months spent trading on the coast and coming into contact with various diseases and harsh climatic changes had devastating impacts on everyone aboard.\textsuperscript{59}

During the first 24 days of the voyage headed for Havana, the \textit{Venus Havannera} had a smallpox outbreak, causing enslaved Africans below the deck to become so sick “they could not come on deck to eat, not could they be attended to as they ought.” Contagious diseases like small-pox were something that commanders looked out for before purchasing; hence, they paid so much detail to the skin’s quality, checking for blisters or rashes. Even with inspection by surgeons, ships could not prevent outbreaks of disease. The letter dated May 31, 1814, acknowledges the quick spread of illness, especially when the ships come upon turbulent weather; the letter states that “experience has shewn, that, on being wet with rain water, they are much exposed to take the small-pox; and their nature, however well they look, does not resist the sea.” Selecting the most healthy or “prime” of Africans did not eliminate the spread of disease. For the enslaved and sick, any medicine or health care given to them was at merchants and sailors’ discretion. Merchants instructed captains and crew to treat Africans “as they should;”\textsuperscript{60} however, on the sea, sailors exercised their hierarchical power over Africans and sought to prioritize their health and survival.

\textsuperscript{58} TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 26.
\textsuperscript{59} Mustakeem, \textit{Slavery at Sea}, 57.
\textsuperscript{60} TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 7, 23. See also Manuel Barcia, \textit{The Yellow Demon of Fever: Fighting Disease in the Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Slave Trade} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).
Treated as damaged goods, the crew members of the *Venus Havannera* quickly disposed of ill Africans throughout the Middle Passage. Dias Viuva & Co. provided Teixera and his crew with detailed instructions for ensuring their “cargo” would successfully arrive in Havana. Repeatedly stated throughout expense reports and letters are the instructions to “get rid of the negroes as they die,” in which they cast their bodies overboard. Trading companies and sailors treated death as inevitable, planning quick and economical solutions to save costs. Every decision was motivated by economic gain, erasing the personal lives and genuine pain and loss Africans endured. In his letter regarding the spread of small-pox, Teixera ensured Dias Viuva & Co. that the losses of captives were to decrease, stating, “I hope that few more will die.”

When leaving Bonny, the *Venus Havannera* carried a total of 530 Africans on board. For a 180-ton schooner carrying 530 captives, the captain and sailors had to strategically pack bodies to the ship’s configuration in an economical way. Typically, slave ships confined captives to the lower decks, organizing by sex and arranging them to lay in “locked spoon-way” formations, keeping them in tortuously tight proximities with little space to stretch or have any proper ventilation. The lower decks were the hottest and most humid areas of the ship, making it extremely uncomfortable and unsanitary. Traders’ racialized belief that Africans could better withstand hot weather led them to believe that the hot lower decks were withstandable. Sailors’ racialized assumptions that

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61 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 22.
62 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 23.
63 Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea*, 59-60.
Africans were better suited for hot climates and believing Africans had high pain
tolerances all contributed to the lack of care and accommodations onboard.64

Figure 4. “Diagram of the Decks of a Slave Ship, 1814” Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the

The harsh conditions of the Middle Passage had damaging effects on African
captives’ mental health on board. Just days into the Venus Havanna’s voyage from
Bonny to Havana, “five [Africans] threw themselves into the sea.”65 For Jose Sousa
Teixera, he had to report the deaths as “losses” of Jose Mathias Acebal and Dias Viuva &
Co.; however, suicides of those five captives (if not more) represent the agonizing effects
of the Middle Passage. Quantifying suicide rates throughout slave voyages has been
difficult for historians to decipher, but estimates show that in the eighteenth century, 5-

64 Mustakeem, Slavery at Sea, 60. Mustakeem explains that European slavers believed that the
tropical climates of Africa better prepared Africans for the humidity and heat of the slave ships;
whereas Europeans were unsuited for the lower decks of the vessels due to their inability to “bear
the heat.”
65 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 12-13.
7% of deaths were by suicide. There is no indication of the identities of those who jumped from the Venus Havannera; however, the excruciating violence women frequently endured on slave ships possibly suggest that those who jumped could have been women. Sexual violence by crew members gave enslaved women the mobility to access the upper deck of ships, where women more often than men committed suicide by jumping overboard. Men, too, were occasionally brought to the upper decks for air, food, and exercise; however, fear of male-led insurrections placed higher levels of supervision when they were allowed on the upper deck.

The Middle Passage was a defining moment in the process of unmaking a person. The inhumanities of the trade served as reminders of enslaved status. The decks, chains, and squalor served as architectures of control, reminding the captives on board the power dynamic between themselves and the sailors. For the surviving captives aboard the Venus Havannera, the Middle Passage would continue on an unexpected and unfamiliar path when seized by the Royal Navy.

**Condemnation**

On her voyage to Havana, the Venus Havannera “sprung her foremast,” forcing the crew to stop in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, to fix the damages before proceeding to

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While sailing westward towards the Greater Antilles, on July 17, 1814, the HMS Barbadoes, under the command of Captain John Fleming, caught and anchored the Venus Havannera on the island of St. Thomas (West Indies) before condemning the ship to the Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola. On July 22, 1814, the Vice-Admiralty Court condemned the Venus Havannera and 303 Africans: 199 men, 48 women, and 56 children on board as “prize of war, to the sole use of his Majesty.” The condemnation of the Venus Havannera was a product of wartime search and seizures, along with Britain’s effort to suppress the slave trade. For the 303 “liberated” Africans, their lives as English subjects in Tortola relied upon their ability to produce labor and conform to colonial society’s expectations.

Before the Venus Havannera left Rio de Janeiro for the Bight of Biafra in 1813, Jose Sousa Teixera sent a letter to the Spanish consul in Rio, Juan del Castillo Y Carroz, dated November 9, 1813, inquiring if the Spanish government had entered into a treaty with the British government prohibiting the trafficking of slaves in the Atlantic. According to the letter, which appears in the 1816 court appeal, Castillo was unaware of whether Spain and England signed a treaty but thought there might have been a treaty between the two countries, and Castillo was unsure of it. Although there was no legitimate treaty enforcing the Spanish trade, the wartime era exposed Spanish vessels to English search and seizure. Britain’s first attempt at international abolition was in 1811 when Britain and Portugal entered a treaty that prohibited non-Portuguese vessels from...
entering Portuguese and English territories of Africa to engage in the slave trade. Before departing for Africa, Castillo warned Teixera that “on no account could they go to those parts of Africa where there are Portuguese establishments, as there was a treaty between His Britannic Majesty and Prince Regent of Portugal.” The first decade of abolition was filled with treaties and constant legal changes, alongside the Napoleonic wars, leaving uncertainty over legalities of the slave trade.

The 1807 Slave Trade Act not only outlawed all English vessels from illegally engaging in the slave trade, but it also declared slave ships as enemies of the crown. Under the act, all lawful captures and condemnations of slave ships were eligible to receive prize money. When English vessels caught slaving vessels they adhered to specific protocols. When detaining enemy ships, English vessels detained them in the nearest ports where they brought slaving captains to Vice-Admiralty courts. When anchored, junior officers boarded and seized all property from the ships. For African captives, English sailors condemned them to yards and lodged them until their adjudication. The exact bounty Captain Fleming and his received is unknown. On May 6, 1817, three years after the capture of the Venus Havannera, the “Account of Money Paid or Claimed Under Acts for Abolition” noted that the bounty for the ship was

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75 TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 6.
77 For details on unlawful seizures of foreign ships from 1808 to 1817 see; Rees, Sweet Water and Bitter, 46-49.
78 Scanlan, “The Rewards of Their Exertions,” 114.
79 Rees, Sweet Water and Bitter, 51.
unclaimed due to “doubts having arisen whether Captors were entitled to the Bounties granted under the Abolition Act; and if so, whether at the higher or lower rates.”

For the Africans condemned by the Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola, the process of condemnation gave them a slim status of “freedom.” When released from the bounds of the *Venus Havannera* and Jose Mathias Acebal’s ownership, 303 “captured negroes” became the property of the royal crown. Despite abolitionists’ efforts in London to limit slavery in the West Indies by suppressing the slave trade, the transfer of Africans from Spanish slavers to English prize courts still perpetuated the commodifiable treatment of Black bodies. Although the intention to stop the slave trade and interrupt foreign slavers’ Middle Passage, the court system treated liberated Africans as financial investments for the English colonies.

The newly “free” Africans in Tortola simultaneously became a colonized labor force for the island. Like most liberated Africans, some experienced forcible migration in other colonies like Sierra Leone, forced military enlistment, and others performed field labor on the island. Of the 48 women condemned from the *Venus Havannera*, most went into domestic servitude; many married and had children during their indenture. “Freedom” for liberated Africans was a form of “direct legal ownership,” rather than equality in colonial society. Providing free status to liberated Africans while contracting them to military service or domestic servitude gave the British an undeniable sense of

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80 *PP*, “An Account of Sums Paid under Acts for Abolition of Slave Trade as Bounties for Slaves (Navy Office),” 1817, (17) XVII.221, 8.
ownership over them. Although the English treated the Africans on board the Venus Havannera as contraband, granting them free status while extracting labor provided bound liberated Africans to British authority.\footnote{Scanlan, “The Rewards of Their Exertions,” 114.}

On August 14, 1814, the Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola adjudicated the Venus Havannera and 303 Africans found on board. Jose Mathias Acebal and Dias Viuva & Co., lost the ship to auction by the English courts, and Jose Sousa Teixera sued the High Court of Admiralty in London on August 6, 1814, for the return of his “sole and absolute property,” claiming ownership of 20 enslaved Africans.\footnote{TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 2-4.} Within months of adjudication, the court sentenced the 303 Africans from the Venus Havannera to their employers for 10 to 14 years. On August 16, 1814, the court apprenticed Ahadda, a 19-year-old woman, with marks on her temples, to John Hanley, Esq., a planter in Tortola. The court apprenticed Ichakuma, a 20-year-old man, described as having a tattoo of 4 lines on his forehead to George C. Forbes, Esq., an attorney for the King’s counsel in Nevis.\footnote{PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25, 143.} The lives of all the men, women, and children “liberated” by the Vice-Admiralty courts from the Venus Havannera mirrored the lives and experiences of the island’s enslaved population.

**Conclusion**

The Collector of Customs recorded Ariange in the Schedules of “Females captured on board the Spanish ship Venus,” as 32 years old, 5’3, and having “four spots on her chest.” Along with her physical description, the Collector noted that she was a domestic to John Hanley, Esq., a planter in West End Tortola for the first eight years of her ten-year sentence, and then transferred to a free black woman named Rebecca Rymer.
in Spanish Town, Virgin Gorda.\textsuperscript{88} Tortola’s political and legal culture, riddled with corruption and competition between groups of elite whites, was incapable and unprepared to create a system where violence toward liberated Africans could be regulated. In a slave society, violence permeated all spheres of life for all people, and as liberated Africans, navigating the rigor of colonial society, defined their experiences as apprentices.

\textsuperscript{88} PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 156.
Chapter Three

ADMINISTRATIVE VIOLENCE

In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the British West Indies underwent significant political transformations. The intra-imperial legal system maintained economic, social, and political opportunities for a small class of male elites, when liberated Africans had to confront upon their arrival in the West Indies. Although the British Empire saw profound changes with abolition in 1807, the expansion of imperial authority in the sugar colonies did not produce a colonial society that was well equipped or prepared to promote the well-being of the enslaved African population. While the Royal Commission of Inquiry was responsible for investigating the “state and condition” of liberated Africans, the Commissioner’s lack of action in cases of mistreatment and abuse was a result of decades of corruption in the criminal and Vice-Admiralty court in Tortola and throughout the greater British West Indies. The competing initiatives for power among elites, imperial officials, and abolitionists over legal jurisdiction in the colonies perpetuated an environment that left liberated Africans, especially women, vulnerable and unprotected from violence. For Ariange, who experienced a considerable amount of violence, action on behalf of the Commissioners would not take place.

On August 16, 1814, the Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola condemned Ariange as a “captured negroe,” along with the other liberated Africans seized from the Venus Havannera.\(^1\) In the process of condemnation, the Collector of Customs recorded Ariange as #230 in the Tortola Schedules. According to the Schedules, Ariange was in her early

\(^1\) *PP*, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 156.
twenties in 1814, about 5’3 in height, and had “four spots on her chest.” Upon her condemnation, the Collector of Customs sentenced Ariange to a ten-year apprenticeship to the English planter, John Hanley, Esq, until his death in 1822. The Collector of Customs then transferred her to a free mixed-race woman, Rebecca Rymer, on June 19, 1822, in Spanish Town, Virgin Gorda. Hanley owned the Long Bay estate in Road Town Tortola, having 60-70 slaves working the plantation throughout the 1810s to 1820. When Ariange moved to Spanish Town with Rymer, her living situation changed drastically as she was Rymer’s only apprentice. According to John Dougan, a Commissioner in Tortola, Rymer lived with a white man named “Coulter,” with whom she was in a concubinage relationship. Ariange’s entry in the historical record is dramatic and dreadful, reflecting the social, racial, legal, and economic complexities of slavery and abolition. Yet the record does not indicate much of her day-to-day experience with Hanley or Rymer. The Commissioners on the island reported her image and behavior in relation to her servitude to the colony.

Ariange’s experiences, reflected in the Schedules and commissioner reports, make a tragic appearance in the archive toward her final year of indenture. On April 1, 1823, Ariange met John Dougan, who was appointed along with Major Thomas Moody to report the “state and condition” of African apprentices on behalf of the Royal

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2 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 156.
3 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 156.
5 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10-11.
6 Anita Rupprecht, “‘When He Gets among His Countrymen, They Tell Him That He Is Free’: Slave Trade Abolition, Indentured Africans and a Royal Commission,” Slavery & Abolition 33, no. 3 (2012): 446.
Commission of Inquiry. According to Dougan’s report on his encounter with Ariange, other liberated Africans in Spanish Town urged him to investigate the “ill-treatment [of] their countrywoman.” Upon entering the chamber of Rymer and Coulter’s home, he saw the “unfortunate apprentice without any covering” and in a position where “her hands were tied over her head to a cross beam of the house,” and “her body bore the marks of chastisement given [to] her by a cat.” When Dougan interviewed with Rymer and Coulter, they explained Ariange’s faults resulting in her painful condition, and Ariange, according to Dougan, gave no further explanation other than she refused to remain in Spanish Town. Analyzing what Marisa Fuentes has called “mutilated historicity” of Ariange reveals how the different competing structures within colonial society, informed by slavery, imposed violence on liberated Africans like Ariange. The lack of intervention in abuse cases reflects Tortola’s political culture that bred corruption within the Prize, Admiralty, and Criminal Courts.

(18th and 19th) Century Intra-Imperial Conflict

& The Case of Arthur Hodge

To better understand the Commission’s lack of intervention in Ariange’s appalling case, it is essential to analyze the deep-rooted corruption in the Vice-Admiralty courts. The trial and execution of Arthur Hodge, the first West Indian slave owner to be

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executed for the murder of his slave, reveals the political tensions between colonial elites and the imperial government. Although it may seem odd to attribute political transitions of power in the West Indies to one specific trial, the Hodge case is significant as the investigation into his misconduct was driven by politics; rather than the concern over the treatment of slaves in the Virgin Islands.  

On May 16, 1811, Arthur Hodge, a Tortolan sugar plantation owner and member of the Vice-Admiralty Court, was hung from a mango tree for the murder of his slave. The murder of Prosper, an enslaved man who owed Hodge 6 shillings for a mango, in which Prosper only provided 3 shillings, led Hodge to cart-whip him and leave him in chains to die. Hodge’s trial gained much attention, not just for the shocking testimonies of abuse, but primarily because his political enemies actively sought the opportunity to debase Hodge and his associates’ power. Intra-imperial conflict, along with inter-imperial law, sat at the center of Arthur Hodge’s trial. The crime Hodge was found guilty of was the brutal violence toward his slaves and the murder of Prosper; however, it is probable that if Hodge’s case occurred just a few years before it happened in 1811, he would not have faced criminal charges. In the colonial context, Hodge’s trial revealed the political tension over his work in the Vice-Admiralty Court, where he oversaw prize cases. Bringing charges against him was a political opportunity for reformists to remove his appointment in the court, which would allow for the political opposition to dictate

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13 Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 91.
15 Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 96-97. See for details on abolitionists’ attempt to prosecute slave owners in 1806 but failed to bring criminal charges. Hodge was another opportunity in which his political opposition was more prepared to take over the courts.
colonial policy. On a larger scale, Hodge’s case allowed imperial authority to gain further jurisdiction in both the prize courts and the colonial criminal courts. Lauren Benton convincingly argues that Hodge’s trial and execution is a significant example of “jurisdictional jockeying within empires” that had significant impacts on abolition and the Vice-Admiralty court in the Virgin Islands.16

Since the 1770s, colonial elites predominantly maintained the Prize and criminal courts as they remained far removed from the authority of the imperial government. These elites were predominantly slave owners who sought to protect their “property rights.” As argued by Diana Paton, “part of the legal meaning of slavery is that slaveholders have the right to inflict violence on their slaves, [and] part of the legal meaning of slavery’s abolition is that this right is withdrawn from slaveholders.”17 Abolitionists and imperial representatives struggled to gain authority in the colonial sphere on the regulation of slavery. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the British Empire expanded its authority on an international scale, increasing the need for imperial jurisdiction in the Atlantic.18

The planter class remained relatively successful at keeping abolitionist and imperial influence away from their colonial operations. In the 1780s, abolitionists in London began to debate the “arbitrary power” of slave owners. In response, the Virgin Islands passed “An Act for the Good Government of Negroes and other Slaves” in 1783, which established a “uniform and [consistent] government of slaves” and set specific

16 Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 94, 96.
18 Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 94.
forms of punishment for fugitive slaves.\textsuperscript{19} The act itself did not ease the lives of enslaved people; instead, it allowed the planters to maintain their “property rights” and allowed abolitionists to influence the power of slave owners. Over a decade later, St. Christopher passed the 1798 Leeward Islands Slavery Amelioration Act, which sought to “provide support, and extend certain regulations for the Protection of slaves.”\textsuperscript{20} Again, the Act passed by the Virgin Islands imposed slight restrictions on slave masters without drastically upsetting the power structure of the island.\textsuperscript{21}

Within the first decade of the nineteenth century, the British Empire expanded its legal and military presence worldwide. However, West Indian planters, like Hodge, who dominated the court system in the Virgin Islands, were also able to manipulate the development of the Vice-Admiralty Court and Prize cases from wartime captures and slave ships like the \textit{Venus Havannera}.\textsuperscript{22} After the passing of the 1807 Act of Abolition, the Vice-Admiralty court suffered from further corruption. One of the most controversial episodes of misconduct occurred in 1810 with Lord Alexander Cochrane, a member of the Admiralty Court and responsible for condemning captured slave ships. On several occasions, under Cochrane’s authority, “vessels were sometimes condemned for the captors, upon their paying a sum commanded by the Admiralty Court, which ought not to have been condemned.”\textsuperscript{23} Hodge and Cochrane participated in a realm of corruption;

\textsuperscript{19} PP, 1783, (67), An Act for the Good Government of Negroes and other Slaves, for preventing the Harbourage and Encouragement to Runaway Slaves, and for restraining and punishing all Persons who shall abet the pernicious Practices of trafficking with Slaves for any of the Staple or other Commodities of these Islands,” 154-66.
\textsuperscript{21} Gaspar, “Ameliorating Slavery,”241; Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 99-100.
\textsuperscript{22} Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 104-105.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Historic Hansard}, vol. 15, George III year 50, 1810, “Commons Sitting of Monday February 19, 1810.” (468-493).
even as their roles as officers of the Admiralty Court placed them under the authority of the crown, they were able to maintain some autonomy despite imperial authority. However, abolition and expansion of imperial jurisdiction in the West Indies allowed for the Governor of Tortola, Hugh Elliot, to strategically place jurors who were politically opposed to Hodge and the planter class within the courts.\textsuperscript{24}

For Hodge’s trial, the grand jury consisted of 23 men who were all attorneys.\textsuperscript{25} From the moment court proceedings began, the council of Oyer and Terminus, appointed by Governor Elliot, addressed the grand jury, reminding them of the corruption in Tortola’s courts, which they argued needed justice. The mistreatment of slaves was never mentioned in the declaration of the council to the grand jury. The council stated that “the government of the Virgin-Islands has for too long [...] been considered, not only weak, but perhaps pusillanimous by offenders.”\textsuperscript{26} The council further declared that “when the laws are trampled upon, and the magistrates defied, no good order or decorum can exist in society.”\textsuperscript{27} Perhaps when the motivation of imperial representatives was to remove corrupt magistrates and replace seats in the court with like-minded officials, it is not surprising that Hodge’s trial ended in his conviction and execution. The tiny island placed limits upon how many people and who was in power. However, the motivation behind Hodge’s conviction signals the prioritization of increasing imperial authority rather than liberation or justice for enslaved people. Imperial reformists’ justification of Hodge’s

\textsuperscript{24} Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 103.
\textsuperscript{25} Arthur Hodge, Abraham Mendes Belisario, and the British Virgin Islands, Court Of Common Pleas. \textit{A report of the trial of Arthur Hodge, Esquire, late one of the members of His Majesty’s Council for the Virgin-Islands at the island of Tortola, on the 25th April, 1811 and adjourned to the 29th of the same month, for the murder of his Negro man slave named Prosper} (Middletown: Tertius Dunning, 1812), 39.
\textsuperscript{26} Hodge, et al., \textit{A report of the trial of Arthur Hodge}, 38.
\textsuperscript{27} Hodge, et al., \textit{A report of the trial of Arthur Hodge}, 38.
conviction and execution derived from their desire to extend legal authority over the planter class by filling the courts with imperially aligned magistrates. Therefore, part of nineteenth-century imperial expansion meant expanding the British Empire globally and taking back control over the legal and political life of the West Indian society.28

After Hodge’s execution, his attorney, William Musgrave, was exiled from Tortola, allowing Musgrave’s and Hodge’s political enemies to take over the Prize Courts.29 This allowed grand jury member Abraham Mendes Belisario, a Jewish sugar planter from Jamaica, to gain the position as “Marshal” in Tortola’s Admiralty Court. Upon Hodge’s execution, Belisario became Marshal for the Vice-Admiralty Court.30 Belisario’s role in the case of Arthur Hodge, which led to the development of his career in the Vice-Admiralty Court, is another example of the incessant power grabs in colonial society in the early nineteenth century. Interestingly, Belisario was a planter and slave owner in Jamaica and Tortola, but he aligned himself with British imperialist rule to regulate West Indian planters. Although he participated in Hodge’s conviction for his cruel treatment of his slaves, Belisario acted not on behalf of justice or humanitarianism but for opportunity to gain a seat in the expanding imperial rule. As Marshal of the court, Belisario abused his position by appointing excessive amounts of liberated Africans to his estate in Road Town, totaling over 200 apprentices from the following captured slave ships: Venus Havannera, Nancy, Manuella, Candelario, and Atrevido.31

Belisario’s corruption in the Vice-Admiralty courts appears in the case of his apprentice, Accomohie, captured from the Venus Havannera alongside Ariange. The

28 Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 96.
29 Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 109.
30 Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 109.
31 Benton, “This Melancholy Labyrinth,” 109; PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules.”
Schedules describe Accomohie as a 20-year-old woman, 5’1 in height, with a “circle on her forehead.” Like Ariange, Accomohie makes a tragic intervention in the archival record. Accomohie was apprenticed to Belisario on August 16, 1814, to his estate in Road Town. According to the Schedules, for a brief period in 1815, she was transferred to a woman named Ann Berkeley, but was unofficially transferred back to Belisario, where she remained for the remainder of her 10-year indenture. The parliamentary report states that Belisario described Accomohie as “insolent, and violently turbulent, and instigating her husband to be insolent to his master.” In the Commissioner report by Major Thomas Moody, a free Black woman named Kate assaulted her on Belisario’s property, “[seizing Accomohie] by the arm and left breast, and tore her clothes,” Kate’s husband then proceeded to “seize [Accomohie] by the throat, endeavoring to [choke] her.” In his interrogation with Commissioner Moody, Belisario provided lengthy descriptions of his credentials and rank in the Vice-Admiralty, ensuring Moody that he has been able to provide better treatment towards his apprentices compared to other employers who “cannot furnish them with sufficiency in food.” Belisario’s position in the Vice-Admiralty court provided him with the opportunity to use his authority to create and manipulate a system that benefited him. Although Belisario sought to weaken the planter class’s presence in the courts due to his support of imperial authority, corruption, especially regarding the lives of liberated Africans, continued in the Virgin Islands.

32 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 158.  
33 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 158.  
34 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies I,” 338.  
35 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies I,” 340.
The Royal Commission of Inquiry

Within the first 14 years of abolishing the slave trade, the Royal Commission of Inquiry investigated the “state and condition” of “Captured Negroes.” William Wilberforce, a staunch abolitionist in Parliament, called for the commission to collect information on liberated Africans to determine if they were capable of becoming civilized and able to engage in wage labor by the end of their indenture. The Commissioner’s reports also intended to use the information and testimonies of masters, mistresses and liberated African to craft colonial policy that could eliminate or modify slavery in the West Indies. The Royal Commission of Inquiry is also a result of the expanding imperial presence in the Caribbean. However, the commission proved problematic. The process of collecting information for the reports was inconsistent, and the findings contradicted anti-slavery arguments, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the commission by 1828.

Although the Commissioners were representatives of the imperial government, they defied and self-interpreted the Orders in Council and the political operations of abolitionists in Parliament, leaving “discrepancies between their idealised representations and their material outcomes.”

The Orders in Council were decrees from the Privy Council, orders which the colonies were to adhere to. However, even with the expanding imperial presence in colonial society, Tortola remained removed from the British mainland’s supervision, and the Commissioners enforced the Orders in Council with their own discretion. Their duty, ascribed to them by Earl Bathurst, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was to

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36 Rupprecht, “‘When He Gets among His Countrymen, They Tell Him That He Is Free,’” 436.
37 Rupprecht, “‘When He Gets among His Countrymen, They Tell Him That He Is Free,’” 450.
38 Rupprecht, “‘When He Gets among His Countrymen, They Tell Him That He Is Free,’” 437.
investigate whether liberated Africans were “treated as slaves.”\footnote{Abstract of the Acts of Parliament for Abolishing the Slave Trade, and of the Orders in Council Founded on Them (London: African Institution, 1810), 40.} The Orders in Council attributed slavery to agricultural labor; therefore, the Orders state that liberated Africans “shall not, nor will, on any account, employ, or cause, permit, or suffer, the said apprentice, to be employed in agricultural labour in any way whatsoever.”\footnote{Acts of Parliament, Orders in Council (London: African Institution, 1810), 40.} However, the Commissioners disagreed on upholding the Orders in Council, specifically how to interpret what “treated as slaves” meant for the colony.\footnote{In the Cape of Good Hope, colonial officials had the same issue of defining and distinguishing what labor for enslaved people versus liberated Africans looked like. Research on the Cape colony in the 1820s demonstrates that colonial reports stated that apprentices indeed were treated “exactly” like slaves by local missionaries. In Sierra Leone, liberated Africans during the 1820s were treated as a “flexible labour force” as Britons maintained a racial and cultural superiority of liberated Africans. See Christopher Saunders, “Liberated Africans in Cape Colony in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” The International Journal of African Historical Studies 18, no. 2 (1985): 223-39; and Padraic Scanlan, Freedom’s Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).}

The histories of both Commissioners informed how they enforced and interpreted the Orders in Council. Dougan was the son of a sugar planter in Demerara, a merchant, and a Prize Agent. Dougan’s past complicated his colonial career, as he grew up in a slave-owning family but adopted evangelical and abolitionist beliefs in 1799 when he traveled to England. Moody and Dougan had familial ties, as Moody married Dougan’s niece. Moody’s family had a long military career, allowing him to gain a college education and become a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers.\footnote{Rupprecht, “‘When He Gets among His Countrymen, They Tell Him That He Is Free,’” 440-441.} Both Dougan and Moody prioritized the sugar industry’s success and the island’s social hierarchy in their work as Commissioners. Dougan was known for assigning liberated Africans to large plantations, despite his disgust with the Middle Passage. Contributing to the political controversy surrounding Lord Alexander Cochrane, Dougan assigned approximately 100 liberated...
Africans to Cochrane’s sugar plantation in Trinidad, which Cochrane used the “cheap” labor to expand the productivity of his estate. Moody felt strongly about maintaining colonial structures, emphasizing disciplining and surveilling liberated Africans to ensure they would not disrupt imperial infrastructure. Moody’s long career in the military and work as a representative of the imperial government influenced his prioritization of the British empire over liberated Africans’ well-being. Although Dougan and Moody shared loyalty to the betterment of the colony, records show that bitter disagreements between Commissioners took place over the interpretation of “treated as slaves.” In a letter to the lieutenant-general, Sir James Leith, Commissioner Gannon stated that African apprentices in Tortola “were ACTUALLY TREATED as slaves,” regardless of Moody’s assessment stating apprentices “were not actually considered a slaves, but as captured Africans.” Unfortunately, their disagreements were just that-- disagreements. The Commissioners and the courts did little to define and enforce proper treatment.

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43 Rupprecht, “‘When He Gets among His Countrymen, They Tell Him That He Is Free,’” 441; see also TNA, CO 295/34 for correspondence in the Colonial Office in Trinidad regarding complaints over Cochrane’s exploitation of liberated Africans.
44 Rupprecht, “‘When He Gets among His Countrymen, They Tell Him That He Is Free,’” 441.
45 PP, 1826-1827, (463), XXII.517, no. 22 “Reports by Coms. of Inquiry into State of Slaves in H.M. Colonies under Acts abolishing Slave Trade: (St. Christopher’s, Nevis and Tortola),” 75.
With the Orders in Council in place, the Commissioners were to ensure that liberated Africans participated in work that would give them a trade; however, despite breaking the Orders in Council, the Commissioners were aware of abuse in instances when liberated Africans worked in agriculture, yet they did not intervene. In John Dougan’s report, he states, “very few of those Africans taken by proprietors of estates, and indented to them as domestics, were employed in that capacity, they were engaged for the most part in the cultivation of the ground, or as herdsmen.”

Dougan further acknowledged that Africans apprenticed to plantations experienced harsh-treatment, saying, “another planter, at Tortola, had received a like number, and two only remained

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46 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 8.
alive. In both cases, I have great reason for believing that the apprentices had experienced hard treatment, and a want of sufficient and proper food.”

Dougan justified the problem of abuse and exploitation, saying, “I feel a high gratification in exhibiting the reverse of this picture, in the kind treatment shown by J.M. Donavan, esq. A sugar planter in Tortola, towards his African apprentices.”

Although the type of labor liberated Africans performed was not for the Commissioners to decide, their prioritization of the colony dictated how or if they upheld the Orders. On many occasions, Moody and Dougan report cases in which liberated Africans performed agricultural work and experienced harsh conditions that mirrored slavery. The Commissioners stated that the Orders that prohibit field labor were “unnecessary” as “Tortola is solely valuable to Great Britain as an agricultural colony,” and channeling Africans away from agriculture is unproductive.

Liberated African women fell in a vulnerable position in colonial society, exposing them disproportionately to neglect by colonial officials. In his report, Dougan describes two liberated African women, Kitty and Amelia, whose master, Mr. MacClean, had punished them so severely that Earl Bathurst “[authorized] the Commissioners to direct the collector of the customs at once and immediately to remove the apprentices from the service of such a master.”

Dougan wrote in his report that although in Tortola Mr. MacClean held no legal title over the two women, they were re-apprenticed to him.

\[47\] PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 8.

\[48\] PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 8.

\[49\] PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 65.

\[50\] PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10.
and remained with him after Dougan’s investigation.\(^{51}\) Dougan reported that the reason the collector allowed Mr. MacClean to keep Kitty and Amelia, regardless of what Bathurst ordered, was “the respectability of [Mr. MacClean’s] character” and “the assurance he gave of the future good treatment to the apprentices, coupled with the difficulty in these small islands of obtaining responsible person to take charge of them as masters.”\(^{52}\) Following Hortense Spillers’s concept of the preservation of the “master” class that upholds patriarchal and racial order, the case of Kitty and Amelia, even Ariange, demonstrate that hegemonic mandates rooted in the debasement of the subaltern class to preserve the “master class” and the economy perpetuated violence upon “rescued” Africans.\(^{53}\) Throughout the report, both Dougan and Moody express concerns over the depleting white population in Tortola, who were seen as the “fittest” to “protect and provide” for liberated Africans.

When Dougan found Ariange in April of 1823, he expressed his disdain for Rymer and Coulter’s treatment of Ariange; however, Dougan’s lack of intervention or removal of Ariange from Spanish Town reveals how with the expansion of imperial policy, like the Royal Commission of Inquiry, the well-being of liberated Africans and enslaved people did not remain at the forefront of policy. For Ariange, Dougan’s intervention was surface-level, as he “prevailed with [Rymer] to remove the cord which bound the apprentice to the roof, and [he] obtained a promise that no further punishment

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\(^{51}\) *PP*, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10.

\(^{52}\) *PP*, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10.

\(^{53}\) Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 75.
should be inflicted upon her.”54 In his interview with Rymer and Coulter, Dougan supported their justification of violence, stating “the degree of moderation of which they took great credit to themselves, especially as the apprentice had been guilty of the further fault of having complained of her mistress to the Commissioners, and of having refused to go back with her to Spanish Town…for neither of which crimes she had been punished.”55 Dougan concluded his investigation, leaving Ariange in the custody of Rymer and Coulter. It is important to note that Dougan’s lack of intervention goes beyond his role. The large political system that allowed for liberated Africans and enslaved people to be used as political tools to alter colonial power dynamics directly impacted cases of violence.

**Conclusion**

Ariange’s encounter with the Commissioners reveals a complex form of violence that dictated liberated Africans’ daily lives. The non-intervention by officials during cases of blatant abuse and torture, such as Ariange’s, forced them to remain in a physically and emotionally vulnerable position. The decades of political feuding among the planter class and imperial allies throughout the British Empire created a system in which enslaved people and apprentices became political tools to advance the initiatives of abolitionists, slave owners, and imperial representatives. Political competition and evolving forms of corruption in the Vice-Admiralty and criminal courts helped those in power, at the cost of the safety and care of liberated Africans who remained dangerously close to the conditions of slavery.

54 *PP*, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10-11.
55 *PP*, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10-11.
Chapter Four

SOCIO-RACIAL AND GENDER HIERARCHIES

Reports by the Royal Commission of Inquiry reflect that Ariange’s life in Tortola, especially with abuse, was tied to her experience with enslavement and slavery as an institution. The violence inflicted upon her by Rebecca Rymer, a free “colored” woman, and Coulter, a white man, signals an amalgamation of social dynamics concerning race and gender, informed by chattel slavery. This chapter examines how free status, being highly restrictive due to legal and economic conditions placed upon non-whites, forced the free population to imagine and act out their freedoms in violent ways. Through the analysis of Rymer and Coulter’s scene of violence reported by Commissioner Dougan, it is probable that Rymer, as a member of the free population, inflicted violence on Ariange to establish herself in the social hierarchy of colonial society that subjected black women, free or enslaved.

The social structures liberated Africans involuntarily entered were highly complex and superseded divisions between whites, freed people, and enslaved blacks. Whether in urban or plantation societies, all classes of people were “symbiotically interrelated” through the decades of creolization among Africans, Carib, and Europeans in the West Indies, creating continuous conflict. The social hierarchy in the West Indies granted white men dominance over white women, free people, Natives, and enslaved people, resulting in constant struggles of power that, as seen in the case Ariange, frequently turned violent. White women gained power by debasing the freedom of black women, and free blacks sought freedom by debasing the power of enslaved people and

African apprentices. The social and racial hierarchies were not linear; instead, they were chaotic, contradictory, and violent. For liberated Africans entering West Indian society in the early nineteenth century, the turbulent social relations of slave societies consumed them.2

Defining Freedom

In the Atlantic world, colonial and imperial demands for economic dominance harnessed black women’s bodies. The *Code Noir*, passed by the French in 1685, was the first comprehensive slave law that legally placed the burden of expanding chattel slavery on the bodies of black women. Edicts like *partus sequitur ventrem*, stated that the free or slave status of the mother determined the status of a black child. Enslaved men who married free women produced free children; however, in the reverse scenario, “the father is free and the mother enslaved, the children will be slaves the same.”3 Owners of black women were granted privileges, in the sense that “children who will be born of marriage between slaves will be slaves and will belong to the master of the women slaves.”4 On a larger scale, black women’s bodies were passed through owners’ hands to the colonial government when enslaved women had children out of wedlock. In those cases, the father of the enslaved children and the master of the enslaved women paid fines to the government, and the enslaved woman was “confiscated for the profit of the [royal] hospital, without ever being manumitted.”5 The Atlantic and the development of plantations that enriched European monarchies relied upon the wombs of black women.

Slave owners and colonial officials wielded authority over the bodies of black women

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3 *Le Code Noir ou recueil des reglements rendus jusqu’a present*, 1685, §XIII.
4 *Le Code Noir*, §1685, XII.
5 *Le Code Noir*, §1685, IX.
through routinized torture, confinement, and social dislocation. Although black
womanhood was not entirely universal, black women experienced a unique form of
sexism, different from what white women experienced. The color of black women’s skin
had different social implications, influencing how black women navigated society.
Therefore, race defined black womanhood.\(^6\)

Free women’s bodies weren’t more “free” than those of enslaved women, as they
navigated a patriarchal society reliant on black women’s labor. The male European
perceptions of black women’s bodies dictated how free women practiced their free status,
and these perceptions are of those that sexualized and commodified enslaved women.
Free women lived within proximity to the “licentious,” “monstrous,” and “breeding”
black woman. Jessica Marie Johnson posits that “freedom gained definition when and as
African women and women of African descent pushed back against their own
enslavement and subject position.”\(^7\) Attempting to challenge the perceptions that subject
them, free and enslaved women found a plethora of ways to determine their own
freedom, whether it was successful or unsuccessful. Rebecca Rymer’s social status as a
free “colored” woman situated her in a society where the enslaved women around her
defined her freedom. Both her relationship with Coulter and her treatment of Ariange
were probably avenues of defining her freedom.

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\(^7\) Johnson, *Wicked Flesh*, 2.
The British West Indies had particularly restrictive Black Codes that tethered enslavement to the privileges of free people.\(^8\) The 1783 “Act for the Good Government of Negroes and other Slaves” passed in the Virgin Islands, as most colonial laws sought to regulate the enslaved population’s movement. Although this Act revolved around prohibiting slaves from abandoning their masters, it associates slave restriction to the “privileges” of free people. The Act of 1783 required that as part of freed people’s status, within 30 days of their freedom, they had to register and pay five pounds to the Office of Treasury.\(^9\) In addition to paying the fee and registering with authorities, free people had to find a “patron” or “protector” who could inform colonial officials of the “tenor and conduct” of the free person.\(^10\) It is important to note that throughout the nineteenth century, slave masters were not required to register their slaves with the colonial government. In fact, it was not until after Arthur Hodge’s execution in 1811 that Tortola, along with the African Institute, attempted to create legislation that required the registration of slaves; even amid nineteenth-century abolitionism, the initiative to register slaves was not successful.\(^11\) Enslavement informed the free population’s lives, and with legislation like the Act of 1783, the free population found itself subjected as property to colonial authorities and subordinate to the white population.

The subjection of free people in the Virgin Islands was complex. The Act of 1783 both extracted labor from free people while simultaneously providing them with a sense

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\(^8\) Black Codes in the British West Indies increased in the late seventeenth century as planters struggled to keep the enslaved population from revolting; this was a significant issue in Barbados, and other islands modeled their Black Codes after Barbados. See “An Act for the governing of Negroes,” August 8, 1688, in Hall, ed. Acts, Passed in the Island of Barbados, 112-21.
\(^9\) PP, 1783, (67), Part III, 6A.
\(^10\) PP, 1783, (67), Part III, 6A.
of authority over the enslaved population. The Act required that all free black men, Natives, and free “mulatto” men enlist in the Virgin Islands militia, where “on all occasions, when required by Writ from the Commander and Chief… [they were required] to go in quest and pursuit of runaway slave or slaves.” Since the Act of 1783 was created by and for the enrichment and preservation of power by the small ruling class of white elite planters, it is not surprising that the free population would also be required to meet racial capitalism’s demands. Planters’ hegemony required the construction of a top-down social formation that enlisted free black men to keep the large slave population suppressed. Although race played a significant role in the subordination of free and enslaved people, the strategic construction of hierarchy between free and enslaved people allowed the colony to function with increased modes of control.

Since the freedoms of free people were so lightly bound to the suppression of the enslaved population, Fugitive Slave Acts continued to tighten the free population’s mobility in the Virgin Islands. “Colonial Laws Relating to the Importation and Protection of Slave, 1788-1815,” published by the House of Commons, detailed all Black Codes enacted in the West Indies from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. The codes illustrate how restrictive life for the enslaved population was and how difficult it was for free and Native people to define their own freedoms or expand their social mobility. In 1800, the Bahamas passed “An Act for the more effective to prevent the desertion of Slaves,” which detailed lengthy and meticulous regulations to prevent fugitive slaves on the island from abandoning their masters and escaping to neighboring

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12 *PP, 1783*, (67), Part III, 6A.
islands. One section in particular stated that all free black and Natives must “provide themselves with a silver medal of the size of a dollar, on which shall be engraved in legible characters the initial letters of the name of such free person of colour, with the number of his or her certificate, with the word ‘Free.’” The order further states that the “medal shall be worn at all times [...] at his or her breast exposed to public view, in order that they may be generally known and distinguished from slaves.” This Act signals how race bound the free population to enslavement because their skin color placed a burden on them to prove their free status, and failure to do such a thing in colonial society permits the white population to jail them. Having free status was not enough, nor could free people in the British West Indies “be free,” they had to prove they were not slaves, and in the case of this particular code, a tiny piece of metal determined their confinement, mobility, and humanity.

For free people, forming distinctions from the enslaved population was arduous, as race imposed economic hardships for those of free status. They navigated an economy dominated by the white planter class in a society tainted by chattel slavery. Free people made up a relatively small percentage of the population; even with abolition, the British West Indies had an overwhelming slave population. In the 1810s, approximately 9 percent of the population in the Virgin Islands was free. This number grew to 22 percent by the 1830s; however, the enslaved population remained consistently higher. With an overwhelmingly high slave population predominantly working in sugar production or

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other agricultural industries, the free black population performed low-paying jobs and lived in relatively poor conditions. Freedmen often sought the privileges of white slave owners by becoming slave owners themselves. Since freedmen had limited economic opportunities, they typically rented or managed small plots of land, which made it common for them to employ slaves in urban centers or sugar estates owned by white planters. Relationships between freedpeople and the enslaved population could be turbulent, often becoming hostile. Economic and legal hardship inscribed on free people provoked resentment and “humiliation” for them as they lived within proximity to the enslaved population and conditions that mirrored slavery. Colonial laws that sought to regulate fugitive slaves restricted the free population’s economic, social, and legal mobility, forcing them to aggressively and creatively create a boundary from slavery.

With the immeasurable social restrictions, the free population grasped the slightest amount of opportunity to expand their freedoms. The 1783 Act for the Virgin Islands prohibited the “indulgences of masters, mistress, owners, renters, and overseers of slaves” from the enslaved population. The Act specifically targeted celebrations at slave funerals. In his study of Jamaica, Vincent Brown argues that funerals in slave societies act as a “final rite of passage” that shaped social order, which allowed different groups of

17 Loren Schweninger, “The Fragile Nature of Freedom: Free Women of Color in the U.S. South,” in Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 107. Schweninger makes an important point that free women were challenged with staying within close proximity to regions that were heavily populated by the enslaved, especially manumitted women or women who were related or married to slaves. The struggle to maintain those connections and form community came with low occupational status. In positive case, free women were able to own small plots of lands to maintain their self-sustenance.
18 Higman, Slave Populations, 112.
19 Higman, Slave Populations, 112.
people to “act out their vision of social hierarchy.”20 For free people, engaging in funerals without enslaved people’s specific restriction, they accessed the opportunity to participate in “aesthetics of freedom.”21 The Act states explicitly that slave funerals were not allowed to occur after sundown, and more significantly, slaves were allowed nothing more than a “deal board coffin” that could not have any “covering or ornament.”22 The Act further stated that slaves caught wearing scarves or trying to “imitate White persons in pompous and expensive funerals” were liable to receiving “any number of stripes not exceeding fifty.”23 Freed peoples’ opportunity to “imitate” whites on the island through having access to bury their dead in a way different than the funerals of the enslaved population gave them the distinction of freedom. Although free people were economically disadvantaged compared to the white population, free people in regions throughout the African diaspora created ways to “look” of higher status. Regardless of how effective attempts to act of high status were, free people and enslaved people sought to challenge the boundaries of racial capitalism that worked hard to restrict them.

**Inverted Levels of Power**

Although white domination operated intensely by constructing legal and economic restrictions for non-whites, sexuality and power over the physical body of subordinate classes of people drove slave societies. White men and women enacted power over their slaves through intimacy and torture; however, power was not absolute, nor did it manifest singularly. White women and black women participated in inverted

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22 PP, 1783, (67), Part III, 6A.
23 PP, 1783, (67), Part III, 6A.
power levels, which allowed them to manipulate racial and gendered conditions.

Although white mistresses were subordinate to their husbands, they had power over black men; black women navigated sexual coercion and exploitation among white men to define their freedom.24 By analyzing the relationship between Rebecca Rymer and Coulter, it becomes clear that their relationship involved a power struggle for dominance through intimacy and the subjection of Ariange.

Rebecca Rymer was one of a group of free blacks who were the legal employers of liberated Africans. By the 1820s, the white population in the British Caribbean was in decline. In the two decades between 1810 and 1830, the white population throughout the entire British West Indies declined by 12 percent. Several factors contributed to the decrease in the white population. Since the eighteenth century, the sugar industry’s expansion pushed out small white slaveholders from the island who could not compete with large sugar estates. These white populations transitioned in artisan work instead of planting, removing them from the sugar colonies. Another reason for this decline is that between 1810 and 1830, the free population grew 70 percent throughout the entire British West Indies due to the increase in free children produced by free people and the manumission of slaves.25 With the declining white population, commissioners struggled to place liberated Africans with the free black population. Dougan stated his frustration relying on the free population, stating “the collector found great difficulty in obtaining proper masters for the Africans, and was compelled at last to apprentice them to [free]

25 Higman, Slave Populations, 76-77. See Higman’s Table 4.2. Estimated Slave, Freedman, and White Populations by Colony, 1810 and 1830, 77.
persons who were in very poor circumstances, and unable to support themselves.”26 The reports from the Commissioner of Inquiry in Tortola further detail the state of poverty of free blacks, demonstrating a stark difference in resources had by white employers. In a report signed July 24, 1823, Commissioner Major Moody interviewed Richard King, a Member of Tortola’s House Assembly. King had lived in Tortola for 25 years and shared his observation on free blacks’ inability to maintain their apprentices, stating that “the generality of the free people in these islands are miserably poor [from] indolence, and want of industry.”27 King’s observation that free blacks were unable to provide care for liberated Africans due to their economic condition signals the economic hardships free blacks had in the Virgin Islands that inform the ways black employers like Rymer defined her status in relation to Ariange.28

Although the Commissioners do not comment on Rymer’s economic condition, her “concubinage relationship with a white man” signals that there was possibly some social and economic dependence on Coulter. Anti-miscegenation laws varied throughout the British West Indies; however, Dougans’s documentation that Rymer and Coulter were involved in an intimate relationship was not a unique concept. The Schedules describe Rebecca Rymer as a “freed colored;” according to the various racial definitions in the British West Indies, the term “colored” referred to a person of mixed African and European ancestry.29 “Colored” women, or women of mixed race, formed intimate bonds

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26 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 8.
27 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, 344.
28 Similarly, this was occurring in Sierra Leone among free Blacks. See Scanlan, Freedom’s Debtors.
29 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules.” For breakdowns of racial identities in the British West Indies, see; Higman, Slave Populations, 153-157; Hilary Beckles, Natural Rebels: A
with white men as a way of improving their statuses. Although these relationships were exploitative, coerced, and often unsuccessful, the engagement in power-based relationships allowed black women to push back against their subjection.\(^{30}\)

The power dynamic between Coulter and Rymer, specifically regarding inflicting punishment or “disciplining” Ariange, signals Coulter’s privilege over both Rymer and Ariange. When analyzing Dougan’s report from April 1823, in which he found Ariange in a state of distress, Dougan acknowledges that Coulter administered the punishment, stating, “the unfeeling man who had been flogging this naked female, pointed to the cat as a justifiable instrument of punishment, and as one that showed his lenity.”\(^{31}\) Dougan further stated, “beyond this, he seemed to have no sense of the impropriety of his conduct, nor of the outrage on all decency which was involved in extending this poor woman, in a state of nakedness, to he punished.”\(^{32}\) The fact that Coulter administered the punishment and Dougan ultimately accepted Coulter’s behavior begs the question as to how Coulter was able to take Rymer’s “right to discipline” her apprentice. The Orders in Council authorized employers to discipline their apprentices for “corrective” purposes.\(^{33}\) However, Coulter was not the legal employer; therefore, he had no legal right to discipline Ariange. The Commission of Inquiry reports a number of instances where free blacks abused the apprentices of whites, and they condemned those actions; this indicates that Coulter was able to debase the legal authority of Rebecca Rymer.

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\(^{30}\) Johnson, *Wicked Flesh*, 3.

\(^{31}\) *PP*, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10-11.

\(^{32}\) *PP*, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10-11.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Abraham Mendes Belisario, Marshall in the Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola, employed over 200 liberated Africans. In the Commissioner’s reports, several of Belisario’s apprentices were abused or “punished” by free blacks on the island. In one case, particularly his neighbor, a free black woman, physically assaulted his apprentice, Jane, a 19-year-old woman. In Belisario’s interview with Commissioner Moody, he declared that he would prosecute the free black woman for wrongfully punishing and harming Jane. It is unstated whether Rymer prosecuted or sought any compensation of wrongdoing by Coulter; however, it is probable that she did not, as Dougan’s report states, that Rymer justified the act of violence by Coulter. It is also possible that Coulter’s violent demonstration of his authority and privilege towards Ariange reflects the colonial practice of increasing power through violence.

Violence pervaded every area of colonial society, and it was utilized by all groups of people, whether enslaved, free, or slave-owning. The dynamic between Rymer, Coulter, and Ariange demonstrates how the debasement of Ariange was an opportunity for Rymer to define her own status as a free woman of mixed race. In Marisa J. Fuentes’s work on enslaved women in Barbados, she posits that free women’s agency “depended on the subjugation of others.” In her analysis of a free woman named Rachael Polgreen, who prostituted enslaved women in Bridgetown to naval officers, Fuentes states that “the system of violence in which Polgreen operated granted her the power to enact violence on the bodies of those she enslaved.” Similarly, the restricted opportunities the colonial government offered Rymer allowed her to subject Ariange. As violence and authority

34 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 341.
35 Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives, 16.
36 Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives, 61.
worked in conjunction, the public display of Ariange as bound and beaten by Rymer and Coulter was an act of domination. Dougan stated in his report that “the half blind of the window having fallen down, the wretched sufferer stood exposed in this state to the gaze of the mob collected in the street.” 37 The public display of violence, bondage, and whip marks on Ariange’s body acted as a form of “body memory,” exposing her unfreedom, which inscribed her subjection permanently. 38 Like many free people forced to confront their own subjection, Rymer inflicted violence on others to liberate themselves from the many confines of colonial society.

Conclusion

Ariange’s appearance in the archival record is minimal yet defined so heavily by a horrific scene of violence. Reconsider this violence as more than “harsh treatment,” it is clear that both Rymer and Ariange were both competing for freedom in a society that subjected and commodified black bodies. Rymer’s image in the Commissioner’s report also holds silences, at first sight making her appear ruthless and evil; however, this is not an analysis of agency or resistance; instead, it is an analysis of freedom struggles, into which Ariange was thrown. To a certain degree, Rymer’s efforts must be appreciated as they tested the bounds of racial capitalism and because her actions reflect the social, racial, and gendered conditions in Tortola that Ariange and other liberated Africans navigated.

37 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 10-11.
38 Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives, 16.
Chapter Five

GEOGRAPHIES OF CONTROL

The colonial landscape of Tortola asserted dominance over the mobility of black bodies through various forms of control and violence. Records from the Royal Commission of Inquiry and Schedules show how the social production of space informed the lives, mobility, and acts of freedom among liberated Africans. Although Ariange takes up minimal space in the archival record, her relationship with the environment around her looms within the records of her apprenticeship. When employed by John Hanley in Tortola and Rebecca Rymer in Virgin Gorda, Ariange confronted and navigated the space around her as she served time in the jail in Road Town while apprenticed to Hanley and fled Virgin Gorda while apprenticed to Rymer. Ariange’s moment of confinement and resistance documented in the Schedules reflect the political aspect of colonial space. The colonial landscapes of the British Virgin Islands, and specifically, Tortola, asserted control over the mobility of liberated Africans through various forms of violence. The demand of the urban economy and the gendered and racial organization of labor influenced the type of work liberated Africans performed. Ariange, like most women, worked in domestic labor in urban and semi-urban towns, which exposed her to sexual exploitation and coercion. Further, structures and material symbols of violence, like jails, throughout urban spaces sought to deter the autonomy of black bodies, including liberated Africans, who would find themselves subject to public forms of punishment and surveillance. With limited mobility, liberated Africans in Tortola resisted objectification by fleeing the island and their employers and using the urban landscapes to conceal themselves from colonial officials. By examining Ariange’s experience with colonial environments, this chapter asserts that geography impacted the
daily lives of liberated Africans, and in turn, liberated Africans asserted a counter-
geoography of resistance.

The unique characteristics of semi-urban and urban life in Tortola and the
decreasing planting class of elites influenced Ariange’s life in Tortola during the early
nineteenth century. Compared to Jamaica and Barbados, Tortola’s limited agricultural
production influenced a system where state control impacted all classes of people—
planters, poor whites, free blacks, slaves, and African apprentices like Ariange.¹ The
military activity of the Napoleonic Wars, accompanied by the growth of the Vice-
Admiralty Court in the port city of Road Town, expanded imperial authority, which
perpetuated a society where one person’s “freedom” relied on another person’s
confinement and dependence.

Urban Life, Domesticity, and Sexual Violence

For most of Ariange’s apprenticeship, she resided at John Hanley’s estates in
West End and Road Town, coastal port cities of Tortola, approximately 14 km in distance
apart.² By the early nineteenth century, Road Town was the primary urban center in
Tortola. As a port city, it brought in high levels of trade activity, and its port served naval
ships throughout the wartime era.³ Although Tortola’s ports had increased trade and
military activity in Road Town, the enslaved population overwhelmingly supported
agricultural production, leaving a minimal population of enslaved and apprenticed labor
in urban towns. In 1815, approximately 7,295 slaves lived throughout the British Virgin
Islands, and 23.7 percent worked on cotton plantations, 62.6 percent on sugar plantations,

¹ For a comparative analysis of agricultural production in the British West Indies see Higman,
³ Higman, Slave Populations, 53.
1.1 percent were domestics in the countryside, and 0.7 percent worked on provisions of lands. By the 1820s, there was a decrease in the enslaved population, lowering the population to 6,444. Although the total population declined in the decade leading up to emancipation, most enslaved labor remained in rural areas and on plantations. Since most enslaved labor resided in rural environments, slaveholding in urban centers was minimal, as approximately 10 percent of the enslaved population in the British West Indies resided in urban towns by 1807 and 9 percent by 1834. Since urban towns maintained a small percentage of the enslaved population, freed blacks and whites outnumbered slaves and apprentices.

By the early nineteenth century, Tortola’s port cities like West End and Road Town expanded in commercial and military activity, increasing the demand for an urban labor force, particularly laboring women. The “Act for Enabling His Majesty to Permit the Importation and Exportation of Certain Goods,” passed in 1806, declared Tortola a free port, allowing foreign traders to import sugar, coffee, and other goods for Tortola to re-export to Britain. The trading activity, which bolstered Britain’s naval presence alongside the Napoleonic Wars, supported the urban economies. Many free blacks and whites worked local trade, shopkeeping, and fishing, which supported the incoming travelers, merchants, and sailors who frequented the local ports. Since slave owners in urban spaces did not partake in planting and slave ownership compared to rural landscapes was low, their slaves and apprentices typically worked alongside them. Therefore, local industry informed the range of labor that apprentices and slaves

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4 Higman, *Slave Populations*, 53. See in Higman, Table 3.5 Employment of Slaves in the Virgin Islands, 1815 and 1823.
6 *PP*, 1806, (112), I.363, no. 1 “Bill for enabling H.M. to permit Import and Export of Goods to and from Island of Tortola (as amended by Committee),” 690.
performed for their masters. Of the entire enslaved population, only 7.6 percent worked as domestics in environments, 2.4 percent as hucksters, and 1.9 percent in fishing throughout the 1820s.\(^7\) For liberated African men who were apprenticed, rather than enlisted in the British West India Regiments, fishing and general labor in Road Town was a common occupation. Unquo, a 27-year-old male from the *Venus Havannera*, described as being 5 feet 3 inches tall and “tattooed on the temples, and letter A on [his] breast” was described as “a good oarsman, and employed as a porter.”\(^8\) According to the Schedules, most liberated African women worked as domestics in urban or semi-urban settings. Domestic service supported the urban economy, yet it posed unique forms of subjugation on liberated African and enslaved women, as it often served as a site of sexual exploitation.

The urban economy in port cities like Road Town and West End depended on male travelers, merchants, and sailors. Along with providing standard services like boarding, taverns, and shops, urban slave owners sought to make additional profits by prostituting domestic slaves.\(^9\) Although urban towns and domestic service were sites of sexual exploitation, records on liberated African women do not detail, explicitly, prostitution among female apprentices. However, as Rosanne Adderley finds in her research on household labor and sexual coercion among African apprentices in Antigua and Tortola, the Schedules and Commissioner reports show that African domestics were frequently in sexually exploitative relationships with their employers. Adderley’s research on domesticity and sexual coercion signal how urban life’s social and economic

\(^7\) Higman, *Slave Populations*, 226.

\(^8\) *PP*, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 136.

\(^9\) Beckles, *Natural Rebels*, 142-143.
fabric created an environment in which African apprentices, like enslaved women, were vulnerable to sexual violence.\textsuperscript{10}

On August 16, 1814, the Collector of Custom assigned Ariange, who was 25 years old at the time, to work as a domestic in John Hanley’s estate in West End. Along with Ariange, the Collector of Customs assigned a young girl named Ahadda, or “Hester,” to John Hanley’s West End estate. Ahadda, who was approximately 9 or 10 years old on August 16, 1814, traveled alongside Ariange on the \textit{Venus Havannera}, and she too was assigned to domestic labor. According to the Schedules from 1823, Ahadda was 19 years old, 4’11½” tall and described as having “marks on each temple.”\textsuperscript{11} Records also indicate that Ahadda was a mother of a 4-year-old boy named Will and that “the father of her child [was] Mial Hanley, belonging to Long Bay estate; not married.”\textsuperscript{12} Ahadda re-appears in the Schedules titled “Births and Deaths,” where the Commissioner’s record shows the “father of the child unknown.”\textsuperscript{13} The details of how Ahadda came to be a mother and her relationship with Mial Hanley are vague and disjointed; however, considering her young age and employment as a domestic, it is highly probable that Ahadda and many other domestics like her experienced sexual exploitation in their apprenticeships.

Although relationships between African women and free or enslaved blacks did not always derive from sexual assault or exploitation, the relationship between employer and apprentice could not come from a “free interaction.”\textsuperscript{14} Rosanne Adderley’s work

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{PP}, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 154.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{PP}, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 155.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{PP}, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 181.
\textsuperscript{14} Adderley, “Household Labor and Sexual Coercion,” 181.
“Household Labor and Sexual Coercion” describes a liberated African woman named Rebecca, who arrived in Tortola on the *Candelaria* in 1814. Adderley finds that the Commissioners described Rebecca as “subject to occasional fits of insanity” and having a child with her employer’s brother. Adderley asks the critical question, how was the relationship between a mentally ill female-recaptive and Mr. William Joseph Austin, the brother of the employer, anything but coercive? Adderley’s question on coercion among employers and apprentices, particularly with domestics who interact intimately with their employers, is critical to understanding how organized labor in urban environments exposed African women to sexual violence.

Ahadda and Mial Hanley’s relationship had to be coercive, considering Ahadda’s young age and status. When the prize courts accounted for Africans from captured slave vessels, they divided them into separate groups of men, women, and children, which they considered children to be under the age of fourteen. In the eyes of the Prize Court, Ahadda was barely an adult when she became pregnant. Further, her status as an apprentice, being utterly dependent on her employer created a significant power imbalance between her and Mial Hanley. Again, it is uncertain whether this relationship was rape; however, Ahadda listed the father as “unknown” in the Schedules for Births and Deaths, indicating some issue with Mial Hanley being the father. Adderley’s research on sexual coercion finds that in cases where mothers omit information about the father, it could suggest disapproval of the relationship, adultery, or sexual assault.

Birth records show that sexual coercion was taking place among domestic apprentices; unfortunately, nineteenth-century colonial laws had limited concern over

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16 Kelley, “Precedents,” in Liberated Africans, 32.
17 Adderley, “Household Labor and Sexual Coercion,” in Liberated Africans, 186.
rape and consent. Ahadda’s pregnancy signals how vulnerable domestic laborers were to sexual assault and coercion. Although domestic labor is arguably less physically demanding than field labor, domestics, who primarily reside in urban spaces, remained within tight proximity to their employers and masters, which made them easy victims of sexual violence. It is unclear whether Ariange had children throughout her apprenticeship, but as a domestic in West End, Ariange would have navigated an environment that depended on black domestics and sexually exploited them.

“Architectures of Control”

The urban environment consisted of structural symbols that served as physical reminders of consequences of resistance for black bodies. Unlike rural environments where masters and overseers maintained their authority over the enslaved by wielding a whip, magistrates, militias, and executioners maintained authority over enslaved and apprenticed people with systematized forms of punishment in urban cities. The increasing power of colonial courts and emphasis on public order and punishment allowed local authorities to discipline black bodies at their discretion. For liberated Africans like Ariange, who were jailed in Road Town and navigated the urban landscape where violence and control were omnipresent, symbols of power controlled their mobility as

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they did for enslaved people. These “architectures of control” imposed “terror in the shapes of workhouses, jails, cages, stocks, and treadmills.”

On August 23, 1821, Ariange was committed to the jail in Road Town while apprenticed to John Hanley. Although records do not indicate what led to her imprisonment in Road Town, many liberated Africans found themselves subjected to jail as punishment. According to the Commissioner reports on liberated Africans in Tortola, masters, Commissioners, and officials in the Vice-Admiralty courts struggled with determining how to punish apprentices appropriately. Commissioner Moody stated his frustration, saying that although the Orders in Council protect apprentices from “excessive punishment,” “should an ignorant African not consider the labour expected from him by his master to be such as he would himself wish to give, or should he appropriate the property of others to his own use, or be insolent, or disobedient, there is no method pointed out in the Orders in Council, or indenture, how his duties are to be enforced.” Moody suggested that an “application be made to a magistrate on the part of the master” where liberated Africans would “be dealt with legally” and “indolent” apprentices “be committed to gaol.” Liberated Africans like Ariange, jailed in Tortola, found themselves in the same confinement as fugitive slaves while in a space that mirrored the dreadful conditions of the Middle Passage.

A report by Captain J.W. Pringle to the House of Commons on the “Report on Prisons in W. Indies” examines the conditions of prisons in Barbados, Antigua,

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21 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 341.
22 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 61.
23 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 61.
Montserrat, and Tortola. The report on Tortola, dated March 8, 1838, provides a nuanced understanding of urban confinement. Although Pringle wrote the report after emancipation in 1834, it still provides context to the conditions of the jail in Road Town in the early nineteenth century. In his report, Pringle states that Tortola’s only prison, located in Road Town, was in an “open and airy position.” It consisted of “two stories, with two prison-rooms in each; their dimensions, 18 feet by 16.” According to Pringle, some of the rooms were well ventilated with three windows, while others had “defective ventilation.” Pringle described the prison yard as being located “in the middle of the prison” and being 90 square feet and enclosed by a 12-foot wall. Jailers organized prisoners into different rooms based on sex and offenses. Pringle states in his report that “one of the rooms is appropriated to women” and “another room to the men in the first penal gang; another to those in the second; and the fourth to debtors and persons confined for the non-payment of fines.” The lower floor of the prison held “bilboes under sentence of death, and four others sentenced to imprisonment for different periods.” According to Pringle, the food was far from nutritious, stating, “the diet is dry bread, and not enough of it, On Sunday soup, not good, only beef-water, and salt.” Urban slave societies operated via the exercising of power through organized space, where the majority white population maintained the authority to confine, inflict punishment, and criminalize black bodies.

According to the “Gaol Book of Tortola,” signed by Abraham Mendes Belisario, the jail released Ariange on September 26, 1822, where someone, unidentified, paid 4s. 6d. for her release. The Schedules demonstrate that employers sent their apprentices to jail as a form of “appropriate” punishment that did not defy the Orders in Council. Employers physically “disciplined” their apprentices; however, urban life in Tortola provided a structure of law and order to which employers could submit apprentices. For apprentices and enslaved people, jails associated with public forms of punishment like stocks, treadmills, and chain-gangs served as physical reminders of the power of colonial authority. For Ariange and other liberated Africans who resisted the environment around them, they faced the consequences of urban authority, as well as the punishment of their masters.

Surveillance

**BARBADOS MERCURY, AND BRIDGETOWN GAZETTE**

**RUNAWAY, A New Negro named Louisa, of the Ebo nation, about 13 or 14 years of age, speaks English tolerably plain; she has several of her country marks in the forehead. Whoever will apprehend and lodge her in the cage, shall receive a reward of Eight Dollars, on application to FANNY PRUDEN. All Captains of vessels and others are cautioned against harbouring her, as they will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour, if detected.**

*January 9, 1808*

**TAKEN UP, an African Girl, by the Overseer of Burnt House, in St. Philip’s parish, 4 feet high, full-breasted, with several of her country marks about her; she says her name is Prudence. Any person that can prove their right to the said Girl shall have her, after paying the expenses, by applying to the said Overseer Samuel R. Sarjeant.**

*January 12, 1808*

Throughout the British West Indies, liberated Africans actively sought to resist their status by running away from their employers. Records from the Royal Commission of Inquiry indicate that liberated Africans would leave their employers for short periods

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28 *PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,”* 341.
and return, and some would take more drastic measures by escaping to neighboring islands.29 According to the Schedules from 1823, Rebecca Rymer reported that she could not give a statement on Ariange’s character because she “absented herself for nine months” because “she did not like to go to Spanish Town.”30 It is unclear whether this occurred before or after Commissioner Dougan’s witnessing of Rymer and Coulter’s abuse, or if that particular incident informed Ariange’s decision to run away; however, liberated Africans throughout various colonies in Africa, South America, the United States, and the non-Anglophone Caribbean resisted their status. For runaway apprentices like Ariange, they faced the obstacle of colonial surveillance that utilized the recording of their physical descriptions when they were “rescued” from slave ships by the Royal Navy.

Employers and colonial officials did not idly allow for liberated Africans to flee; instead, the processing of liberated Africans as the Vice-Admiralty Court condemned them allowed officials to monitor and restrict the movements of runaway apprentices. As the Vice-Admiralty Courts processed liberated Africans, it was the duty of the Collector of Customs to detail the “exact list of all such Negroes, specifying the time of the delivery; the ship (if any) in which they were seized, the date of the condemnations,” along with the “name of every such Negro, with the sex and apparent age; and when the African name is not known, or sufficiently easy, clear, and distinctive, some other name shall be substituted.”31 The Collector of Customs was also responsible for recording the “the height of the party, by a careful admeasurement; the African marks (if any), and

29 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II, 14.
30 PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 156.
such peculiarities of feature or person as may serve to distinguish Negroes, should their identity be called in question.”³² For employers, missionaries, and officials, the standardized processing of liberated Africans allowed them to prevent apprentices from abandoning their assigned form of labor, whether they were enlisted in the military or apprenticed as domestics. The process of becoming a “liberated African” and inducted into the British Empire harnessed the identities of Africans, making them commodifiable subjects.³³

Vice-Admiralty and courts of Mixed Commissions meticulously recorded the physical descriptions of liberated Africans, including brands, scars, burns, and “country marks.”³⁴ The 1823 Schedules of African captives from the Venus Havannera show a range of physical descriptions for each surviving captive. Celia, #243 in the Schedules, was described as having the “Letter A on her right breast.”³⁵ As mentioned in chapter one, when Jose Sousa Teixera, the captain of the Venus Havannera, purchased Africans on the coast of Bonny, he was to brand 450 Africans with an “A.”³⁶ Umbeka, #236 was described as “tattooed on both temples, striped between the eyes.”³⁷ Allencorono, #198 was simply described as “scalped.”³⁸ The physical descriptions, predominantly scarification or “country marks,” were utilized in runaway advertisements to easily identify fugitive apprentices.

³³ Scanlan, “The Rewards of Their Exertions,” 115, 118-120; See also, Craton, “The Role of the Caribbean Vice Admiralty Courts in British Imperialism,” in which he discusses the commodification of Africans by the Vice Admiralty Courts.
³⁵ PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 164.
³⁶ TNA, HCA 45/70/10, 23.
³⁷ PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 158.
³⁸ PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 151.
In Tortola, African runaways proved to create a challenge for colonial officials before Collectors could assign them to an employer. Research on liberated Africans in Tortola throughout the early nineteenth century shows that Collectors had to take extra measures when housing apprentices in the island’s barracks. According to Anita Rupprecht’s research, the Collector of Customs employed other Africans known as “Bombas” to assist in the prevention of liberated Africans escaping.\textsuperscript{39} Further, Africans were running away from employers, which in the Commissioner reports, Dougan expressed his frustration stating that it was the responsibility of employers to “prevent their apprentices from going off the island.”\textsuperscript{40} Tracking runaway apprentices had striking similarities to tracking fugitive slaves. In the early nineteenth century, Tortola did not have a professional police force; however, an active militia and local authority policed the island and responded to recovering runaways.\textsuperscript{41} Although an advertisement for Ariange or runaways in Tortola is unfound, reports from the Royal Commission reflect the lengthy efforts Collector and employers went through to retrieve runaways. A common issue for Collectors and employers was apprentices escaping to St. Thomas and St. Croix, which drew planters, overseers, and public officials to the port in St. Thomas to search and notify Danish officials of fugitive apprentices. Road Town served as the

\textsuperscript{39} Anita Rupprecht, “‘He says that if he is not taught a trade, he will run away’: Recaptured Africans, Desertion, and Mobility in the British Caribbean, 1808-1828,” in \textit{Global History of Runaways: Workers, Mobility, and Capitalism 1600-1850}, ed. Marcus Rediker, Titas Chakraborty, and Matthias van Rossum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 198-199.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{PP}, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 27.

\textsuperscript{41} Higman, \textit{Slave Populations}, 229. \textit{PP}, 1783, (67), Part III, 6A.
leading center where notices of missing apprentices with details of their identities and whom to apply to were posted.42

Throughout the West Indies and North American mainland, slave owners have historically written runaway advertisements in a standardized way that allows people within the community to identify and recover enslaved people to their masters quickly. Typically, advertisements detailed their physical description, skills, personalities, personal networks, “worth,” and to whom they belonged.43 When considering the structure of runaway advertisements in the British West Indies, as shown above with Barbados, slave advertisements represent the runaway as missing and valuable property. The offer of a monetary reward and discouragement of assisting runaway apprentices, like fugitive slaves, highlights their unfreedom. For liberated Africans like Ariange, who spent most of their apprenticeship in urban spaces that relied on systematized forms of racialized surveillance like runaway advertisements, her scarification, and experience with slavery and abolition, restricted her mobility.44

Throughout Africa, scarification signaled one’s ethnicity, familial bonds, achievements, and community initiation. Ethnic scarification was not an act of commodification like branding; however, the personal histories in the form of scarification were commodifiable and took new meaning throughout the British Empire.45

42 Rupprecht, “He says that if he is not taught a trade, he will run away,” 204-205. For an example of Collectors tirelessly searching the ports of St. Thomas for runaway apprentices see, PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,” 14, 89-90, 151.
Upon the passing of the 1807 Act of Abolition, the Vice-Admiralty Court in Sierra Leone, and in 1819, the court of Mixed Commissions began inputting descriptions of liberated men and women and children into registers. Like those kept by the Vice-Admiralty Court in Tortola, the courts in Sierra Leone meticulously recorded the physical description of liberated Africans. Similar to Tortola, colonial officials struggled to control African apprentices from running away. In response to fugitive apprentices, colonial officials printed advertisements detailing country marks and other physical descriptions of liberated Africans throughout newspapers. Suzanne Schwarz’s study on liberated Africans in Sierra Leone makes the strong point that runaway advertisements reflect the “persistence of negative attitudes and practices” that allowed for liberated Africans to be treated as slaves and commodifiable property.

There are many gaps in Ariange’s nine-month escape from Rebecca Rymer. Records do not indicate if she was found and returned to Rymer or lived out the remainder of her sentence as a fugitive. Although uncertainties remain over her escape, as a runaway apprentice, Ariange was subject to a colonial policy that tracked and recorded fine details of liberated Africans to monitor and surveil their labor and obedience on the island. The scrupulous recording of body marks as surveillance contributes to a genealogy of violence, in which African apprentices were simultaneously liberated from enslavement and commodified throughout their “liberation.”

48 Schwarz, “Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans,” 203.
Resistance among liberated Africans in Tortola in the early nineteenth century took various forms; however, when analyzing the Royal Commission of Inquiry’s records, African apprentices who ran away from their employers remained scattered throughout the Commissioner’s investigations. Research on apprentice runaways in the British West Indies shows that liberated Africans throughout their initial arrival in Tortola and throughout their apprenticeships participated in “rival geographies” that defied commodification, confinement, and abuse.\textsuperscript{49} Ariange, like other liberated Africans around her and throughout many different colonies in the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa, used their surrounding environments and social networks to challenge their condition. In many ways, running away posed severe risks and was, in many instances, unsuccessful. However, the physical defiance of the space that confined Ariange socially and economically demonstrates that liberated Africans were conscious and critical of the world around them despite repressive colonial systems of governance.

When examining the Schedules and reports from the Royal Commission, details of runaway apprentices are fragmented and do not supply much information regarding the reasons or the specifics on how each apprentice escaped or was apprehended. This is not entirely surprising as Anita Rupprecht posits that reports from the Royal Commission are “vivid reminder[s] of the ways in which instrumental economic imperatives, imperial interest, and fantasies about appropriate colonial subjectivity framed official visions of alternatives to enslaved labor.”\textsuperscript{50} Although the Commissioner reports and Schedules were


\textsuperscript{50} Rupprecht, “He says that if he is not taught a trade, he will run away,” 199.
concerned about runaways resisting their labor duties, the reports and remarks in the Schedules reveal that African apprentices resisted the slave-like treatment from their masters, missionaries, and colonial officials. Importantly, records reveal the role of community and collective struggle among apprentices, which aided their acts of resistance.

As previously stated in this chapter, while apprenticed to Rebecca Rymer in Spanish Town, Virgin Gorda, Ariange was listed in the 1823 Schedules as being a runaway for nine months. In addition to being listed as a runaway, the Commissioner’s remarks state that Ariange was “harboured about Road Town.”51 The brief sentence about her escape and whereabouts in the Schedules does not explicitly detail how Ariange could leave Virgin Gorda or where she was possibly hiding in Road Town. However, the Schedules do signal social networks between liberated Africans that assisted in their escapes.52 Further, the Schedules also demonstrate that liberated Africans escaped by sea and concealed themselves in urban towns. Whether apprenticed or enslaved, running away was done with purpose and often required multiple individuals’ assistance.

When analyzing the Schedules and recordings of other liberated African men and women who sailed on the *Venus Havannera* alongside Ariange, one woman, in particular, had a familial bond with Ariange. Oreaco, who was 28 years old and described as 5’1 and “tattooed all over the face,” was sentenced on August 18, 1814, to work for Richard

52 “The Orders instruct the Collector of Customs to “On receipt of any number of Negroes, natives of Africa, composing the cargo of the same ship, the Collector, or [chief] officer of the Customs for the time being shall do his utmost to ascertain whether any of them are related to, or connected with eat other, as husband and wife, parent and child, or otherwise; and if they are found so to be (of which the uncontradicted assertion of the parties shall be deemed sufficient proof), they shall in no case be separated, except where the employment of either shall make such separation indispensable.”
Roberts, Esq., a merchant in Road Town as a domestic.\textsuperscript{53} In the remarks made by the Commissioners, they state that Oreaco was “married to Robin, apprentice to Mr. Parkinson. Robin is the father of the child. She has a cousin named Kate, who came with her in the same ship, and formerly apprenticed to Mr. John Hanley, last in possession of Rebecca Rymer. Stated by Rebecca Rymer to be a runaway.”\textsuperscript{54} Although records do not explicitly state that Oreaco and her husband were assisting Ariange or her reason for hiding in Road Town, it was commonplace for liberated Africans in Tortola and throughout the British Empire to assist in the escape.

For Ariange to hide from Rymer and colonial officials in Road Town, she had to have sailed from Spanish Town to Road Town, which is approximately 16 miles in distance. Records show that liberated Africans, predominantly males, escaped by sailing to the Danish Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico. Apprenticed men in urban towns had more accessible access to the docks and boats since they predominantly worked in fishing.

However, even for men, the Commissioner’s reports detail the high risk of consequences by sailing from the island, much of which report men fleeing only to be kidnapped and sold into slavery.\textsuperscript{55} Nevertheless, networks of support assisted liberated Africans throughout their escapes. Women especially blurred the lines of support as they formed intimate bonds with enslaved or free blacks, contributing to a broader network of support.\textsuperscript{56} The urban landscape served as an environment where runaways were more likely to hide or blend into the town’s heightened activity, especially among taverns,

\textsuperscript{53} PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 160.
\textsuperscript{54} PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Schedules,” 160. Note, “Kate” is Ariange’s English name, and the only apprentice from the \textit{Venus Havannera} given the name Kate.
\textsuperscript{55} PP, 1825, (114) XXV.193, no. 25 “Reports by Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Africans Apprenticed in West Indies II,”10.
\textsuperscript{56} Rupprecht, “He says that if he is not taught a trade, he will run away,” 206-207.
various plots of lands, markets, and docks. Research on runaway apprentices in Tortola and the Commissioner’s report show instances where liberated Africans abandoned their employers and enslaved, and free people helped harbor them in towns. Therefore, it is probable to assume Ariange’s escape was strategic, being that she had family with whom she shared similar experiences, but Oreaco’s position in Road Town would have allowed Ariange to hide within the city and receive support from her family.

Social networks were crucial to running away for liberated Africans in Tortola, unlike Sierra Leone and Brazil, did not have an avenue to make formal petitions against mistreatment, nor did they partake in organized uprisings. Competing against geographic landscapes meant to confine their movement, liberated Africans like Ariange participated in the “artful escape of objectification.” Historiographically, Ariange’s nine-month escape from Rymer and hideaway in Road Town, where she had familial networks, demonstrates the strategic forms of resistance among liberated Africans in Tortola, who lived in a highly repressive society. Ariange’s escape was an act of defiance, not only against Rymer but the larger colonial system that commodified and subjected apprentices to various forms of violence.

57 Rupprecht, “He says that if he is not taught a trade, he will run away,” 207. Rupprecht describes a liberated African woman, Jane, who ran away from her white-female employer and was assisted by an enslaved woman named “Mama Sally” who raised Jane’s daughter for her when she died.
59 Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives, 17.
Conclusion

The characteristics of urban society in Tortola and Virgin Gorda shaped the daily lives and movements of liberated Africans. As a colonial slave society, symbols of power and control dictated every aspect of life for liberated Africans. The demand of the urban economy, brought on by military and trade activity in local ports, impacted the employment opportunities for women, which placed them within proximity of their employers and subjected them to sexual exploitation. Further, for apprentices like Ariange, who experienced intense violence and sought to reject oppressive systems, physical and material tools like jails and advertisements served as reminders of colonial authority. However, despite the brutality of urban life, Ariange’s escape from Virgin Gorda serves as a reminder that liberated Africans actively opposed and challenged the objectification of colonial society.
Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

“Liberation” for liberated Africans in Tortola throughout the early nineteenth century was contradictory and filled with turbulence. Considering the life and experiences of Ariange, the experience of violence among liberated Africans was much more than single acts of violence by their employers; instead, complex social, political, and spatial colonial systems of control exposed liberated Africans to conditions that mirrored enslavement. By analyzing the systems in which Ariange navigated as a liberated African, this work shows how liberation in a slave society that commodified black bodies made liberatory status unworkable.

The fabric of colonial life in Tortola during the early nineteenth century consisted of a system of dependency and confinement among various classes of people and the larger British Empire. Ideas of “freedom” did not equate to practices of equality as seen with the life and experiences of Ariange; the abolition of slavery created a system where she was dependent on her masters, her masters were dependent on colonial authority, and ultimately, everyone was dependent on the British Empire. The complexities of nineteenth-century liberalism, expansionism, and slavery contributed to the various forms of violence Ariange experienced as a liberated African woman.

This research illustrates violence on a microhistorical scale; however, it also examines the larger colonial systems that ultimately impacted the daily lives of liberated Africans, giving some perspective on what it meant and what it was like to be a “liberated African” in Tortola. By challenging the distorted and mutilated image of Ariange through the application of Black feminist discourse, her experiences can be understood in a more nuanced light. Analyzing the voyage of the *Venus Havannera* and the slave-making
process that commodified and bound black bodies to brute labor and servitude in relation to the Royal Navy’s anti-slavery campaign and the prize system in the Vice-Admiralty Courts it shows how commodification and colonization transformed, rather than, disappeared.

Investigating the political transformations and changes of power in the Vice-Admiralty and Criminal Courts in Tortola, Chapter Two reveals that corruption and competition among the island’s elites, as well as the growing imperial authority, created a system in which liberated Africans who were to be “protected” by the courts were vulnerable to violence. Considering the conflict of interests between Commissioners and Collectors of Customs and between imperial magistrates and newly arriving African apprentices, it is not surprising that the political decisions of local officials directly and indirectly impacted African apprentices. With the prioritization of expanding imperial influence and debasing the power of elite slave owners like Arthur Hodge, severe abuse and neglect occurred due in part to the unpreparedness of colonial officials.

Undoubtedly, the scene of violence described in Chapter Three between Ariange and Rebecca Rymer and Coulter that appears in the Royal Commission of Inquiry reports, is striking and complex. Analyzing the social dynamic between not just Ariange and Rymer but Rymer and Coulter, the racial and gender structures indicate struggles over freedom and power among different genders and races of Tortolan society. Understanding the mobility, and lack thereof, of free blacks through the lens of Black Codes, it is clear that the acts of violence between Rymer and Ariange are manifestations of freedom struggles. As noted in the Commissioner reports, the oppression of free blacks, who were predominantly poor, impacted their treatment and expressions of power and privilege among the new class of liberated Africans. Slavery and the social dynamics
of a slave society informed how free blacks and whites interacted with liberated Africans and where Africans were positioned within struggles over power among West Indians.

Throughout the Schedules and reports from the Royal Commission of Inquiry, space and control were persistent themes in liberated Africans’ experience in Tortola and the surrounding British islands. By analyzing the structure of the urban and semi-urban environment in which Ariange and most liberated Africans in Tortola lived, Chapter Five asserted that space influenced their experiences with violence and control. The demand of the urban economy impacted the nature of work available for enslaved and apprenticed women, which exposed them to sexual violence and coercion. When considering Ariange’s confinement and escape, the traditional structure of urban slave societies contributed to the mobility and forms of resistance among apprentices.

To better understand the experience of liberated African women, confronting histories of violence throughout colonial settlements in the Caribbean, South America, West Africa, South Africa, and the Indian Ocean, future studies can illuminate the racial and gendered implications of British imperialism and abolition. By examining their unique experiences or asking the question about what it was like to be a liberated African woman throughout various regions and empires, researchers can find a range of experiences that complicate historical representations. Furthermore, examining liberated African women on a larger scale can help us probe for answers about the transformation of black womanhood amid abolition.

This micro-historical analysis seeks to complicate the history of Ariange by contextualizing her relationships and interactions within colonial society to understand her experience as an African apprentice better. More importantly, by examining scenes of violence as moments of humanity and expression, this work demonstrates that
contestation and domination permeated Tortola, in which black bodies, regardless of status, were actively engaged. The colonial and imperial policies that inflicted violence upon liberated Africans in Tortola during the early nineteenth century highlight the contradictions that “liberation” amid colonization created a system in which Africans who were not formally enslaved were still bound to British subjugation and control.
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