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Channelle Russell April 12, 2022

Sorting Shadows: Sound, Silence, and Gender in the Aftermath of Jamaican Slavery

by

Channelle Russell

Dr. Meina Yates-Richard
Adviser

Departments of English & History

Dr. Meina Yates-Richard

Adviser

Dr. Adriana Chira

Committee Member

Dr. Justin Hosbey

Committee Member

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Abstract

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By Channelle Russell

"Sorting Shadows" is an aural exploration into the realities of survival, resistance, and violence within textual representations of Afro-Jamaican women from the Pre-Emancipation to the Pre-Independence periods. Through a cross-temporal exploration of Afro-Jamaican women's soundings and silences, this project considers documents such as abolitionist pamphlets and a coming-of-age novel by Michelle Cliff towards a complex exploration of Afro-Jamaican womanhood and survival.

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Seeking the Self*: an introduction*

She was reaching, without knowing it, for an exploration of her own life.

—Michelle Cliff, Abeng

In Jamaica, death follows. It creeps, shadows behind, and “[holds] everyone’s attention.”[1] Death has occasioned both my trips to the island since immigrating in 2002, the paradoxical grip of death affording opportunities to *come home* even as it bestowed grief. Death had brought me home, to a fragrant world of fire and smoke, and it would rear its head again—and in this instance, the time of death would coincide with my time of arrival. Simply: my return meant someone had to pass. After an hour on an island where individuals are related in proximity to death—*Suzie? Oh, de one whose madda dead*—we shared a meal, and my mother inquired about a childhood friend everyone knew as Chef. Minutes later, back on the road, my uncle got a call: Chef was dead. It was clear. Name-calling was a death sentence. Quickly, his passing became a community event. Call after call, incoming and out. News, like heat, spread like fire in a small place. The next morning, my mother compelled me to walk down the hill to a neighboring home. It was as I settled in, tucking my hands beneath myself, listening to the reunion between my mother and her close friend, that I realized we were at Chef’s home and this woman—this strong-backed, brown, grieving woman—was his wife. I will call her Gloria. When someone passes, physical visits—rich with full-body hugs and tears—are the norm—and I had found myself a front-row seat. I observed the way my mother’s warm hands caressed Gloria’s back, wiped her tears, and grounded her. I watched as death stabilized community—deepened connections and emotions—even as it destabilized a home. Curious, I listened.

[1] Brown, Vincent. 2008. The reaper's garden: death and power in the world of Atlantic slavery. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. Page 11.

Gloria squeezed out between heaves, my mother holding her, “Mi mash up the people dem flower bed.” Floral decapitation by way of grief. “Mi heart di ah flutter. Mi have diarrhea three times.” Her words located her body’s response to her husband’s death as a site of excess affect, existing at the limits, weighing on her body and forcing her physical form to expulsion. Her body, molded by grief, moved *through* death. A pause, and then, Gloria continued, “Mi mek two scream.” Unable to be contained or enunciated through words, her grief manifested itself in the form of two screams. Her specificity—not one, but two—underscored a grief that, so much so could not be contained, must be made audible and doubled. Indeed, the emotion translated through her screams was ultimately an emotion illegible—even in her relation of her screams, we are unable to comprehend the true depth and sheer capacity of Black women’s affect. While she attempted to translate her grief through screams, her cries existed at the limits of language. Thus, the audible scream, even in my attempts to represent, fails to reach.

But why begin here? Why does a project which purports to be about Black women’s survival and being begin with death?

I use this anecdote as my point of departure because Gloria’s screams are a door into the impetus of this project and its attempts to fashion a new relation to the archive through sound and silence. Simply, Gloria’s doubled screams are a passageway into a new form of conceptualizing Black women’s affect and subjectivity. I use the terms *door* and *passageway* historically and deliberately. For this, I turn to Frederick Douglass’s metaphorical and metaphysical notion of the blood-stained gate. Douglass's oft-written-about Aunt Hester's scream introduces us—as it does him—to the world of slavery: it becomes an initiation through the senses. Detailing the comportment of Captain Anthony, his first Master, Douglass relates that he was often “awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of

mine," drawn out of his sleep through sound, those heart-rending shrieks, his Aunt Hester's terrific subjectivity explicated through audio.[2] Captain Anthony's use of the whip solicited from Aunt Hester both sound and its lack, as he would "whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush," her body caught in the whiplashed throes of her master's ambition.[3] (The opposition between sound and "hush" drives the critical impetus for this project.) For Douglass, Aunt Hester represents an "impossible, substitutive motherhood" whose cries *birth* Douglass into his condition, passing down the terrific episteme of slavery through a peculiar instantiation of *partus sequitur ventrem*—or, the slavery doctrine that the condition of the child follows the mother.[4] Douglass' narrative purports to bear witness to these screams, but as scholar Meina Yates-Richard notes, he represents enslaved Black women "in a manner that further abjects black women by presenting them as mute objects."[5] In his representation of Aunt Hester's soundings, Douglass "refuses to linger in the impact of Hester's scream," a sonic and rhetorical refusal that this project seeks to correct by *listening in*, or attempting to fully attend to the doubling of the soundings that mark enslaved women.[6] As it were, kept from close proximity to moments of brutality—Douglass before then lived at the edges of the plantation, a geographic marginality, and was thus shielded from slavery's excess brutality. Douglass "had never seen any thing like" Aunt Hester's terror and, thus, the scene marked a death of innocence, engendered by the spectacle and shrieks achieved through an enslaved woman's subjection.[7] That Douglass "never shall forget" the first time he witnessed the spectacle of Aunt Hester's terror marks the moment

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[2] Douglass, Frederick, and William L. Garrison. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1849. Print. Page 6.
[3] Douglass, Narrative, 6
[4] Moten, Fred. "Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester's Scream." In In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition, NED-New edition., 1–24. University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Page 15.
[5]Yates-Richard, Meina. "'What Is Your Mother's Name?': Maternal Disavowal and the Reverberating Aesthetic of Black Women's Pain in Black Nationalist Literature." American literature 88, no. 3 (2016): 477–507. Page 482
[6]Yates-Richard, "What Is Your Mother's Name," 482
[7] Douglass, Narrative, 6

as a primal scene, that inaugural moment which ushered him into the realities of slavery, marking his passage through "the blood–stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which [he] was about to pass."[8] It is important to note that the text's preoccupation with Hester's screams ceases here and "once completed, renders black women's sounds unnecessary" thereafter.[9]

The blood-stained gate—just as enslaved Black women's terror—was transnational, spanning the Atlantic littoral from Douglass' Maryland to Mary Prince's Antigua, where Prince, an Antiguan slave, recalls a similar moment in the *History of Mary Prince*. A similiar fate belied Prince's fellow slave, a "poor Hetty…I used to call her my Aunt."[10] (That Hetty and Hester share an initial letter is interesting, but not the focus here.) The familial connection of aunt, just as their screams, binds together the stories of Douglass and Prince. Aunt Hetty was often tasked with the running of the house, and much was asked of her. One night, upon delivering an insufficient answer to her Master, Aunt Hetty was greeted with "the cracking of the thong," causing the house to ring with "the shrieks of poor Hetty, who kept crying out." As Hetty was brutally whipped, she screamed—ultimately marking a "sad beginning" for Mary Prince, as she knew, eventually, "her turn would come next."[11] Aunt Hetty and Aunt Hester's cries—and Mary Prince's relationship to both, which duly cannot apply to Douglass—was colored by their shared gender, as "the material relations of sexuality and reproduction defined black women's historical experiences as laborers and shaped the character of their refusal and resistance to slavery."[12] As with Douglass, Prince's narrative demands critical interrogation as to its more subliminal

[8] Douglass, Narrative, 6
[9] Yates-Richard, "What Is Your Mother's Name," 482
[10] Prince, Mary, and Thomas Pringle. . The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian slave. London: F. Westley and A.H. Davis. Digital. (1831) Page 37.
[11] Prince, The History of Mary Prince, 34
[12]Hartman, Saidiya. "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," Souls, 18:1, (2016) 166-173. Page 166.

purposes. "Written out fully, with all the narrator's repetitions and prolixities, and afterwards pruned into its present shape," the *History of Mary Prince*, as published in England in 1831 and though purporting to be the direct voice of a formerly enslaved woman, is ultimately effaced by its production and reception by a largely White, middle-class population.[13] Figuring into the established genre of abolitionist texts, the audience of Prince's *History* undoubtedly colored its themes and political thrust, so as to be rhetorically effective in the metropole. Reading Prince and Douglass, we must, above all, tread lightly.

Reading Prince and Douglass conjunctively, then, to walk through the blood-stained gate is to encounter shrieking initiations into the world of exploitation that defined chattel slavery. It is important here that both instances of the gate feature exclusively the presence of enslaved Black women. Thus, the gate is marked by enslaved Black women's visceral sonority—manifested in the archive as the embodied, perpetuous scream mentioned above—and she *becomes/is* the gate. Contending with her figure, this requires us to undertake a reorienting to sound that figures screams, shrieks, and cried words as windows into subjectivity, into Black women's terror as marked by the institution of slavery. In other words, we must ask as Marisa J. Fuentes and Saidiya Hartman do, "How might terrifying sounds be an opening to represent the lives of the nameless and the forgotten, to reckon with loss, and "to respect the limits of what cannot be known?"[14] Further, grounding the metaphorical space of the blood-stained gate in the lived space of the plantation excavates a reality of the senses—how is the blood-stained gate realized through the motion of the whip and enslaved women's cries? This, Chapter One seeks to answer. Ultimately, entrance through the gate presents scenes of slavery—of removals and refusals, of separations, of brutal performances and fugitivity.

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[13] Prince, The History of Mary Prince, 7

[14] Marisa J. Fuentes. 2016. Dispossessed lives: enslaved women, violence, and the archive. Page 141.

I depart on the conjecture that Black women's shrieks—that is, her screams in the face of extreme subjection and pain—is a perpetuous sound that resonates not only among communities—as Gloria's screams, and as Aunt Hetty and Aunt Hester's shrieks, did—but, when grounded in the historical and literary analysis that this project attempts, resonates within, beyond, and outside the archive. The scream is an echoing sound, doubled in its iteration and re-iteration within the archive—and beneath her representation and when reorienting ourselves to the enslaved woman herself can become a generative *enunciation* of Black affect. Caught in time, this project argues, Black women's screams sound over and over, on and on, heard long after the moment of release and become, outside and contained within abolitionist texts, moments of theoretical and speculative possibility. Enslaved Black women's screams, just as free Black women's silences, linger at the limits of reckoning and engender a new relationship to the archive which attempts to put the Black woman subject first. This archival encounter and my attempts to translate this aural and affective untranslatability to the page thus marks Afro-Jamaican women in the archive as those who are forever in scream. Reorienting scholarship on enslaved and free Black women to the emergence of sound and silence within the archive affords moments for theoretical maneuvering and scholarly encounter that forces one to contend with the very present specter of Afro-Jamaican women. Exploring sound and silence as windows through which to evaluate and attend, fully, to Afro-Jamaican womanhood, this project understands, as Fred Moten asserts, that "the call to subjectivity is understood also as a call to subjection and subjugation," grounding the histories of Afro-Jamaican women in the ongoing afterlives of colonialism and chattel slavery.[15] Locating Black women as "the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world," examining these screams and silences—those untranslatable soundings—this project intervenes in a space where sound and

[15] Moten, Resistance of the Object, 3

silence dictate and are (in the sense of the tongue) dictated by Afro-Jamaican women's attempts at fugitive self-making.[16] Turning from the doubled, echoing cry to a look at silence, this project takes on Kevin Quashie's assertion in *The Sovereignty of Quiet* that "quiet…is a metaphor for the full range of one's inner life—one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears," probing silence as a window into Black women's interiority through the occultation of colonial, family and personal histories.[17] Caught in the space where microhistory and literary analysis meet, this project moves across the temporal schema of Pre-Emancipation and pre-Independence Jamaica to excavate realities of sound and silence referent to Black womanhood. This project, in brief, gets at the task of writing Afro-Jamaican women.

This project, akin to the function of the scream, performs a doubling. At once, it is both historical analysis and literary study. Chapter One zooms in on the space of New Ground Estate in Jamaica in 1832—a Jamaica on the precipice of emancipation, brimming with uncertainty, just a couple of years before the implementation of the apprenticeship system in 1834 and the full abolition of slavery in 1838. This project takes Jamaica as its focus, not afforded simply by my fortuitous place of birth, but because of Jamaica's unique position in the British Caribbean: despite being productively out-performed by colonies such as Saint-Domingue or Barbados, Jamaica was the pearl of empire, possessing the "largest slave population and the most demographically and politically complex society."[18] 19th-century Jamaica functioned as the experimenting ground for British policy and thus provides a rich history from which to depart. Reading Henry Whiteley's abolitionist tract *Excessive cruelty to slaves: three months in Jamaica, in 1832: comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation*, Chapter One investigates

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[16] Hortense Spillers. "Interstices," in Black, White, and in Color. 2003. Page 155.
[17] Kevin Quashie. "Introduction: WHY QUIET." In The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture, 1–10. Rutgers University Press, 2012. Page 6.
[18] Thomas C.Holt. The problem of freedom: race, labor, and politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.1992. Page 8.

an instance of violence where an enslaved mother is laid on her breach and whipped fifty times—eleven times more than allowed by colonial law, though we know this to be common. Chapter One explores a layering of violence: representational violence, as that which confines enslaved Black women in the archive in scenes of pain, and the violent act of whipping itself. The doubling of the scream emerges here as well, as the woman depicted in Whiteley's text screams and is thus represented in perpetuity in sound, demonstrating, as Marisa J. Fuentes' suggests, "the process of archival erasure and the silencing of enslaved women in pain even as they seem to be the focal point of the narratives."[19] Chapter Five of Fuentes's striking *Dispossessed Lives* provides much of the methodological thrust of this project by expanding on her exploration of sound. But where Fuentes focuses on the rhetorical function, I hone in on the aural action itself. Investigating Whiteely's 12th instance of subjugation, the unnamed woman written about in the text figures, in a way, as this project's blood-stained gate: her documented screams are what allows us to evaluate this particular moment of violent subjection and to read, further, terror, gender, and sound in Jamaican slavery. Reading against representational violence requires that we probe the positioning of her scream within the text and its abolitionist function. Turning our attention to the whipping of an enslaved mother forecloses the truth of the daily practices of slavery, where the whip found use in the quotidian and metonymically represented the entire institution as hinged upon discipline and terror. The unnamed woman's screams and cries, like Gloria's, haunt this project, sounding over and over as this project travels from 1832 to 1958, finally settling in the world Michelle Cliff creates in *Abeng*.

Chapter Two briefly troubles the notion of freedom in the years following emancipation before moving into a discussion of silence, closely reading Michelle Cliff's 1984 coming-of-age novel *Abeng*. Investigating how practices of freedom were imagined, idealized, and implemented

[19] Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives, 127

in post-slavery society, I trouble teleological narratives of freedom by exploring the silencing function of colonial education on Indigenous and African histories and the varied uses of silence by the protagonist's mother Kitty Savage. Probing Kitty's deliberate use of silence with those more insidious, colonial silences, this project seeks to understand the role silence played and can play for Afro-Jamaican women in her attempts at self-making and positioning within larger communal society. Chapter Two demonstrates that these silences are generational, produced, and deliberate—and often tied directly to survival and kinship. A shift from the previous chapter's historical bend, Chapter Two performs a close reading of *Abeng* in an attempt to ground an argument around silence and gender in the workings of the text.

On this journey, I read Whiteley's *Excessive Cruelty to Slaves* and Cliff's *Abeng* in search of shadows—attempting to sort them into a story of myself. Stuart Hall's assertion that there can "be no simple return or recovery of the ancestral past which is not reexperienced through the categories of the present" guides this project, as, on this journey, I was colored not just by my desire for understanding my own history but by contemporary understandings of race, gender, and power.[20] Sorting Shadows not only troubles the teleological thrust of freedom as progress but performs a scholarly reorienting of sound and silence as that which exists at the limits of language and *echoes*, locating enslaved Black women and their descendants as subjects who scream, shriek, and silent their way into subject-formation. This account of Jamaica takes violence and death as integral signs, but not as natural. Indeed, violence is produced even as it, in turn, produces social and cultural systems and forms. Reading a scene of extreme violence in Chapter One, this project then moves to contend with the transition from slave society to free society and lastly grounds the work of sound, silence, and violence in a literary exploration of Michelle Cliff's novel *Abeng*. The second half of this project takes on Kevin Quashie's assertion

[20] Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," 1988. Page 170.

that "an aesthetic of quiet is not incompatible with black culture, but to notice and understand it requires a shift in how we read, what we look for, and what we expect, even what we remain open to."[21] At its core, this project asks: what is the function of sound and silence for Black women? If silence is complicity, are screams a testimony to resistance? Or is the answer more unclear, complex, shrouded in the histories of slavery and quasi-freedom? Is survival found in sound or in silence? In expressing one's own humanity or in protecting it?

Listen in. Perhaps the answer is louder than we think.

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[21] Quashie, Sovereignty of Quiet, 6

Crying Out: *Sound, Slavery, and Subjection*

Enslaved women forced themselves into history with their screams—insisting that someone reckon with their battered bodies.

—Marisa J. Fuentes

"For Caribbean man, the word is first and foremost sound."

—Edouard Glissant

Historian Vincent Brown starts his 2008 book *The Reaper's Garden* with sound and death. Brown begins his analysis circa 1800, on account of one British traveler Robert Renny, who details the scene: approaching white passengers as they arrive at Port Royal, Jamaica, a group of "three or four Black women" sing:

New-come buckra
He get sick,
He tak fever;
He be die;
He be die.

Heard for as long as they're "within hearing distance," the women's words are as much a haunting as they are a sentencing to mortality. This song—a sounding by Black women—is the inaugural moment for sailors new to Jamaica. Brown's inclusion of the aural encounter shadows his text with an ever-present reminder of the sound's haunting fatality—and, through sound, the reader's senses are engaged. The words are not just haunting, but, by shifting attention to the voice and its function, the voice of these women transcend the body and become resonant in the

archive. Through sound and its inclusion within the primary source, Brown represents the song as a reconfiguring of mortuary practices during the turn of 19th-century Jamaica. Brown writes, "The song introduced the newcomers to this world, where death structured society and shaped its most consequential struggles."[22] As an introduction, the women's song makes legible the reality of life and death in Jamaica. Further, what is unhearable and impossible to imagine in the metropole is introduced through song. Eclipsing the space of the Atlantic Ocean, what is at once impossible to fully hear in England—enslaved Black women's voices—is impossible to *ignore* in Jamaica.

Unlocking the landscape and demography of colonial Jamaica through sound, Brown foregrounds death as an imminent, sonic experience that so strongly defines the contours of life in Jamaica, death is the introduction for newcomers. Just as the women's voices haunt white visitors, the sing-songy call of "he be die; he be die" haunts Brown's text. The reader asks, why sound? Why, first, does Brown establish a connection between sound and death that focuses on the articulatory power of death and Afro-Jamaican women's voices? Digging into the auditory milieu of Jamaica places Brown's nursery rhyme of death within the general scheme of plantation Jamaica. Brown's work, drawing from Farah Jasmine Griffin's "Black Women's Vocality," represents "the voice…like a hinge, a place where things can both come together and break apart," inextricably tying together sound, death, and articulatory power through predictions of death upon the *buckra* population.[23] The women's song is among the many sounds of colonial Jamaica, existing among a world experienced through the senses.

First, a moment of speculation:

[22] Vincent Brown. The Reaper's Garden. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2010 pp. 4.
[23] Farah Jasmine Griffin. "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality." Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Page 104.

Consider not only the women's song, but, in its totality, the sounds of 1830s Jamaica. There is, on the small island, sounds of harvest—the brutal work of harvesting, hoeing, and preparing cane. The rhythmic mix of Akan, English, and Arawak languages that compose Jamaican Patois. The sounds of laughter, pain, and festivity in an otherwise overwhelming slave society. The rise and fall of the surrounding ocean. Consider the sites of 1830s Jamaica. The plantation's Big House. The outhouses. The boiler room and its accompanying scent of rum and molasses. The port. The slave quarters, peopled by men and women, children and the elderly alike. Consider—if you can—the specter of Death that exists and haunts Jamaica, as pervasive as the wandering, tropical breeze. Consider the duppies and the spiritual presence of ancestors and memory that haunts the land and people. Consider the cracking whip. The permanence of its brutal flesh against skin. Consider the cruel cries of overseers and drivers urging laborers on through the force of violence. The stench of the slave ships and a society with basic plumbing, if any at all. Considering all to be sensory evidence of a cruel economic and social system that champions profit over people.

This was the Jamaica that awaited Christian missionary Henry Whiteley upon arrival in St. Ann's Bay on September 3rd of 1832. Taking Whiteley's text, *Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation*, as this section's focus, reading for the emergence of sound and the aural during an encounter with a nameless, enslaved Black mother.[24] Whiteley's narrative and foregrounding of sound allows access to a sensory experience of enslaved black womanhood that demands attention. Documenting her words and screams, Whiteley's text lends itself to comprehensive engagement of the matrix caught between sound and subjection. A metropolitan man in a colonial space,

[24] Henrice Altink's "*Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838*" explores the rhetorical and sociopolitical motives that underpin abolitionist texts. New York: Routledge, 2007. Page 134.

Whiteley provides a sense of worlding—a sense of the Atlantic—that signifies the importance of the senses, embodiment, and physical presence concerning politics around Jamaican slavery. Thirty-some years after Robert Renny encountered the *buckra* song, Whiteley arrived in Jamaica with preconceptions around the system of enslavement. Before setting foot in the Caribbean, Whiteley "had never read a single publication against Colonial Slavery," and was childlike in his naivety regarding the laboring conditions of the British West Indies.[25] Whiteley, upon arrival, encountered planters who entreated upon him their steadfast belief that the slaves in Jamaica are happy. Whiteley's initial belief, however, that "the condition of the negro slave was much preferable to that of the factory child" conflicts with the reality of enslavement in Jamaica.[26] Due to Whiteley's naive view of colonial law's reception in Jamaica, he is shocked to hear Jamaican colonists rebuff British interference "with their slaves in any shape."[27] Whiteley's metropolitan perspective results in preconceptions that, when confronted directly in the space involved, distort and are laid bare in Jamaica. The political discourse that Whiteley could not hear or see in Britain is apparent to his senses upon embarking on the island.

To further uncover realities of subjection, cruelty, humanity, and the narratives strung across the Atlantic littoral, attention must be paid to some of slavery's most marginal figures and the ways they appear within the archive. For enslaved women, whose subjection hinged upon the double premise of physical and reproductive labor but whose narratives have gone understudied, there is a historiographical and moral duty to prioritize workings of gender and power within slavery studies. Tasked with the historiographical obligation of portraying as full a picture as

[25] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive.

[26] Whiteley. Excessive cruelty to slaves, 2.

[27] Ibid, 3.

possible of enslaved Black womanhood, scholars must interrogate the rhetorical, often violent, representational strategies employed by antislavery and proslavery camps in abolitionist discourse. This chapter focuses on discourses of the former, probing the representation of plantation violence and the voice by abolitionists. Notions of purity and, more generally, metropolitan ideals of womanhood abound.

Inheriting a "rich research agenda" concerning enslaved Black women and slavery, including writers such as Marisa J. Fuentes, Jennifer Morgan, and Sasha Turner, this project turns its focus to dynamics of gender, sound, and violence in Pre-Emancipation Jamaica.[28] Approaching this project, I spent hours wading through the digital archives of Slavery and Abolitonist papers in search of a woman's story that would exceed the violent bounds of others. She would not so much appear in the archive as she would be forced into the soundscape of 1830s Jamaica, serving the narrative arc of Whiteley in his 1833 pamphlet, published among a wider genre of abolitionist texts dedicated to illumining the brutal, violent conditions of plantation slavery in Jamaica.[29] It is in this pamphlet that the subject of this paper—an unnamed slave mother—emerges through scream.

Quoting Diana Paton's *No Bond But the Law*, scholar Marisa J. Fuentes opens the closing chapter of her book *Dispossessed Lives* with the following epigraph: "When abolitionists wanted to convey a sense of slavery's horror, they told stories about women."[30] Enslaved Black women's terror and subjection became the grounds for political debates, concealing her pain in the annals of colonial policy and discouse. In an archive that "conceals, distorts, and silences as much as it

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[28] Brenda E. Stevenson. "INTRODUCTION: WOMEN, SLAVERY, AND THE ATLANTIC WORLD." *The Journal of African American History* 98, no. 1 (2013): Page 2.
[29] Henrice Altink. *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Page 134.
[30] Marisa J. Fuentes. 2016. ""Venus": Abolition Discourse, Gendered Violence, and the Archive." In Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive, 124-43. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press. Page 124.

reveals," representational violence becomes the vehicle through which enslaved women's bodies are cemented in history, often operating on two levels of subjection.[31] First, there is the violent act itself—often a whipping, or other act of extreme violence, where an enslaved woman is laid bare on her front and viciously flogged. Beneath this first, physical substantiation of plantation excess, there is the subterranean, archival violence of abolitionists who, in their appeals for the mitigation of slavery, perpetuate pornotropic, dehumanizing images of Black womanhood. The centrality of Black women's subjection to abolitionist discourse places a narrative burden onto these women, turning their individual pain into material for metropolitan, politicized antislavery campaigns. Reorienting ourselves to these accounts—by attempting to read the enslaved woman's story from underneath and by interrogating the production of abolitionist sources—"does not merely add to what we know; it changes what we know and how we know it."[32] Representing Whiteley's representation of "the vexed and violated subjectivities of enslaved women," while yet attempting to challenge these depictions, this chapter confronts the production of abolitionist discourses even as we contend with the genre-recurrent echoing Black woman's scream.[33]

How do scholars, like Vincent Brown and Stephanie M.H. Camp, write about motion and sound?[34] What are the spatial, bodily facets of the history of slavery? This project expands on the prejecture that "sound from enslaved bodies might be another way of marking enslaved historicity through the violence they endured," arguing that focusing on the body and its acts

[31] Marisa J. Fuentes. "Jane: Fugitivity, Space, and Structures of Control in Bridgetown." In Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive, 13-45. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
[32] Stephanie M. H. Camp. 2004. *Closer to freedom: enslaved women and everyday resistance in the plantation South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Page 3.
[33] Fuentes, 129
[34] See the work of Marisa J. Fuentes and Celia E. Naylor's "Imagining and Imagined Sites, Sights, and Sounds of Slavery" in The William and Mary Quarterly 76, no. 1 (2019) for further scholarship on the intersection of slavery and sound.

reveals a new, fleshed conception to Atlantic slavery.[35] Memorializing scenes of violence and subjection is one function of the documentary archive—but reading against the replication of this violence, searching for the subterranean narratives of the enslaved is another. In a discipline that places so much burden onto the voiceless, reading for aurality attempts to lend a voice—but seldom words—to the enslaved in the face of brutal violence. This voice is very rarely their own, filtered through the perspective that confines her to the page. Here she demands, there she pleads: she is both strength and vulnerability and "in her voice, first and foremost, we hear an almost brutal honesty."[36] Fuentes further writes, "With no method of escape from their violent confinement, enslaved women forced themselves into history with their screams," and the woman who appears in Whiteley's text is no different.[37] Even after she disappears from textual view, her screams stand the testament of time. We hear her cries long after she is gone. These verbal cues become, upon archival encounter, forms of sonic self-assertion—an audible demand for recognition. Drawing on scholars such as Saidiya Hartman and Fuentes, this project argues that one must read beyond written words as every sound, each moan, shriek, and cry is transformed into a language of its own. Writing at the intersection of sound and slavery, this project argues that auditory responses to violence emerge as the catalyst for an enslaved mother's appearance in the archive and her enduring, echoing presence hereafter. Punctuated by her "cries of terror," the commonplace whipping of an unnamed female slave is transformed into a site of extraordinary violence that is individual and communal, shared and personal, defined not just by one woman's auditory resistance and refusal to remain silenced but by her fungibility and the

[35] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 141.
[36] Farah Jasmine Griffin. "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality." Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Page 104.

[37] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 142.

knowledge that her treatment existed the same for other enslaved Black women.[38] The woman in Whiteley's text remains unnamed and, indeed, the fungibility of enslaved Black women is such that any woman could take her place. She is nameless precisely because a name would signify specificity—but any enslaved mother would do and, as are the machinations of a plantation regime which imported slaves as opposed to a self-reproducing population, the story would not change much. This enslaved woman's "dreadful cries" is writ into the abolitionist canon as "another genre of humanity," where humanity is proclaimed through the auditory exclamation of pain and subjection.[39] Listening for her cries, I approach the twelfth whipping with sound in mind: how is sonic resistance present or represented in this scene of subjection? How does the unnamed woman's pleas, "cries of terror," and shriek appear in the archive?[40] And what of the person they emanate from?

Further, by describing "slave women's degrading condition in terms of what their bodies felt," Whiteley thus appealed to the sympathy of British Abolitionist audiences, entreating unto them that slave women too possessed a potential for feminine purity and womanhood constituted through terms of kinship.[41] Whiteley's account is one of "mutilated historicity—the violent condition in which enslaved women appear in the archive disfigured and violated."[42]

In my analysis, I begin by employing Fuentes' concept of an expanded interpretative space:

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[38] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 8.

[39] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 129.

[40] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 8.

[41] Henrice Altink. *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Page 134.

[42] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 16.

> expanding the legibility of these archival documents to accentuate the figures of enslaved women present in the society who are a spectral influence on the lives of white and black men and women… not just reading the documents but reading the communities and context from which they appear.[43]

To understand the unnamed woman's world, a fuller picture of Jamaican society—"of communities and context"— is needed.[44]

Traveling to New Ground estate, his home for the next eight weeks, Henry Whiteley took in the "majestic and beautiful scenery," until his first true encounter with the harsh, degrading conditions of plantation slavery stopped his admiration in its tracks.[45] Struck as he is by the "thundering crack of a cart-whip, sounding in my ears as I rode along," Whiteley confronts the reality of colonial slavery through his senses.[46] Hearing, seeing, and experiencing only tangentially the violence of plantation slavery from across the ocean throws its reality into stark, disorienting view upon firsthand encounter. The audible strike of a cartwhip is, symbolically, metonymically, an auditory representation of the brutality that upholds Jamaica as the sugary jewel of the British empire.[47] So removed from the colonies, Whiteley must confront his incorrect misconceptions through his senses. I want, at once, to hone in on the sound of the cartwhip and its effect both on Whiteley and on the text rhetorically. "Sounding in [his] ears as [he] rode along," the sound of the cartwhip exists across space and time, ringing in his ears long past the moment of encounter.[48] Like the cotton boll and sugar cane, the whip embodies a

[43] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 78.
[44] Fuentes, 73
[45] Ibid, 3.
[46] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 3.

[47] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 3.
[48] Whiteley. Excessive cruelty to slaves, 3.

physical, tangible representation of Atlantic slavery that exposes to Whiteley to the brutality of the system that contributes so much to the British economy. In contrast with his past beliefs about the condition of plantation slavery, the cartwhip ruptures Whiteley's relation to violence, embodied through his body's visceral response to the sound of physical violence. Whiteley's attention to his senses provides the foundation for this essay's premise: sound. The violence of Jamaican slavery made visible in turn mars and distorts the ecological beauty of the Caribbean island, as the "enchanting scenery… no longer amused me."[49] This disconnect, it appears, stems from a rupture between the island's beauty and the violence it houses. Thus, one wonders, how can such beauty and such violence coexist?

Through silence.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the conditions of slavery are represented in ways that conceal the system's brutality, in turn making Whiteley raise "some doubts as to the preferable condition of West India slaves to factory children" when these misconceptions are challenged by reality.[50] Whiteley's reference to the "circumstances that render [his] humble testimony of some immediate value," speaks to the ongoing, contenious political debates waging in Parliament on the topic of Negro Emancipation.[51] Whiteley's acknowledgment of contemporary political debates thus casts his account in light of possible biases—like William Wilberforce's storied testimonies, Whiteley's words appeal to the Victorian, Christian morals of an ever status-aware England.[52] Whiteley, a deeply religious man, arrived in St. Ann's Bay some nine months after the

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[49] Ibid, 3.

[50] Ibid, 2.

[51] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 1.

[52] Forman, Cody Lisa (2000). "The Politics of Illegitimacy in an Age of Reform: Women, Reproduction, and Political Economy in England's New Poor Law of 1834". Women's History. 11 (4): 131–156.

11-day Baptist War, a slave uprising led by mostly-literate slaves closely following the abolitionist debates in British Parliament. The Baptist War, the largest slave rebellion in the British Caribbean, was an eleven-day revolt led by preacher Samuel Sharpe and, at the tailend of Jamaican slavery, was a shock to England.[53] Following Michel Rolph Trouillot's assertion that "when reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings…devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse," what could potentially be writ into history as an unsuccessful but foreboding slave rebellion that attempts to trouble and destabilize British colonial society and economic profit was recast into the language of anti-missionary, anti-Baptist sectarianism.[54][55] Upon arrival, Whiteley notes the sight of a Methodist church "destroyed by the whites six months before."[56] Reducing the Baptist War to a politically and socially contentious strife concerned with religion reveals the precarity of slavery and control within the colony and the anxiety surrounding it. Unable and unwilling to perceive the trouble that led to such uprisings, the planter class's refusal of a "reality [that] does not coincide with deeply held beliefs," subsequently results in their attempt to "phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs."[57] In the case of the Baptist War, religious sectarianism became the namable, knowable, conquerable beast that, unlike the risk of a slave uprising, did not threaten to destabilize the British economy.

Historical attention must be paid, as well, to the medium through which the unnamed mother appears. Confronting the violence of the documentary archive means entering "a mortuary," where the violence that inscribes someone to history has the potential to forever

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[53] Michael Craton. Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies (Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 297–98

[54] Trouillot, 3

[55] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 3.

[56] Whiteley. Excessive cruelty to slaves, 3.

[57] Michel-Rolph Trouillot. "An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-event." Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995. Page 72.

define how a person's story is read—and abolitionist documents function as one such form of death sentence.[58] Contingent upon others for how and if her story is told, the locus of cultural production sits firmly in the hands of those with the power to decide whose story matters. Antislavery texts gained fervor and metropolitan support (and dissent) in the decades preceding abolition. Whiteley's widely-popular pamphlet existed as just one of the many abolitionist texts documenting the horrors of plantation slavery for the English public.[59] What marks Whiteley's text as significant is his rhetorical decision to account for thirteen different instances of whipping, rhetorically inundating the English public with a system driven, quite literally, by the force of the whip. Filtering his anti-slavery text through a lens of Victorian-era modesty and decorum, Whiteley documented his time in Jamaica by enumerating the instances of violence he encounters at New Ground estate, a site which "spatialized domination under bondage."[60][61]On thirteen different instances, Whiteley describes an immutable scene of subjection: a slave is reprimanded, stripped, and laid on their front where they then receive the maximum of 39 lashes on their "breach."[62] Whiteley's attention and at-length detailing of the whip, writing "the whip is about ten feet long…and is an instrument of terrible power," invokes the violent apparatus of the whip and, more symbolically, the violent discipline required to sustain Jamaican plantations.[63] On his first day, Whiteley witnessed six instantiations of punishment. "Perfectly unmanned by mingled horror and pity," Whiteley evoked affect, at once reorienting the spectacle of Black pain to a white man's horror and appealing to british morality when he writes, "I could not have

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[58] Saidiya Hartman. 2008. "Venus in two acts". Small Axe : a Journal of Criticism. (26): 1-14.

[59] See Henry Bleby, Francklyn, and Hibbert for abolitionist texts on Jamaica. Henrice Altink. *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Page 134.

[60] Forman, Cody Lisa (2000). "The Politics of Illegitimacy in an Age of Reform: Women, Reproduction, and Political Economy in England's New Poor Law of 1834". Women's History. 11 (4): 131–156.

[61] Katherine McKittrick. Demonic grounds: Black women and the cartographies of struggle. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2006. Page 44

[62] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive.

[63] Whiteley, 4

believed him, had I not seen it with my own eyes, to be *capable* of inflicting such cruelty on a fellow-creature."[64] Commencing from that first day, Whiteley proceeded to enumerate thirteen instances but notes that he did not "include in this account the slighter floggings," interested, it seems, in the extraordinary—as, truly, it was only the extraordinary, an excess of Black pain, which he found remarkable, notable, and it is only those thirteen instances which are brought to view. The slighter floggings—deemed slight by a man never in fear of being subjected to the whip—thus fade and disappear from our view. For instances one through eleven, Whiteley provided matter-of-fact accounts bereft of names, a sense of time, and the voice of the Black subject he purports to represent. Of the thirteen documented whippings, Whiteley has "retained the precise date of only one of these cases."[65]

Hers.

On September 27, 1832 on the site of New Ground estate of Jamaica, an enslaved woman's screams foregrounded her humanity and the archival possibility of reckoning. She didn't become human through sound but, through her screams, insisted on being heard. Refusing to be ignored, she "rent the air" with her cries of terror, proclaiming loudly and shrilly her pain and abjection for those around her to hear. This flogging of an unnamed mother and wife exists apart from the routine violence depicted by Whiteley for many reasons, as the violence that defines her appearance in the text is violence "outside the normative and acceptable modes of pain required to sustain slavery."[66] As Whiteley progressed through the numbered subjections, he became desensitized to routine scenes of violence, and his rhetoric reflected this burgeoning apathy, witnessed in the text through shortening, fleeting descriptions, subsequently filtering these instances as ordinary, not beyond-the-pale of the accepted violence of plantation slavery.

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[64] Whiteley, 6
[65] Whiteley. Excessive cruelty to slaves, 6.
[66] Fuentes, 138

What is quotidian in plantation life became commonplace in his writing and worldview. In contrast, the 12th instance, the enslaved woman's subjection, is recorded at length, but even as her screams attest to and function as "the site of excess affect and hyperemotionality…the actual feelings of the Black person in question go unrecognized."[67] I take this particular moment in the text as this chapter's focus because, as previously noted, she alone is cemented in the aurals of time and is thus located in an extraordinary, temporal act. Though not rare in colonial society, the unnamed woman's flogging is the only documented case in the pamphlet wherein fifty lashes are delivered—eleven more than allowed by colonial law. Whiteley dedicated twenty-eight lines of text to this one instance, in comparison to just two lines for the instance preceding. In excess, her body is preserved in history. Henrice Altink notes in *Representations of slave women in discourses on slavery and abolition, 1780-1838*, that in such a case as hers, slaves had "the right to obtain legal redress in case they were excessively flogged."[68] Legal redress, however, was rarely, if ever, granted to slaves; this excessive violence was simply part and parcel of a system dependent upon Black women's degradation and her fungibility.[69] Written into this scene and published in Britain in 1833, her body is forever stuck in the motion of flogging and the relentless violence that characterized slavery.

But before she can disappear from the page and from history, her screams and moans, echoing, demand second acknowledgement, turning us towards "the real event of the commodity's speech, itself broken by the irreducible materiality—the broken and irreducible maternity—of the commodity's scream."[70] Punctuating the violent encounter with the audible

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[67] Tyrone S. Palmer. "'What Feels More Than Feeling?': Theorizing the Unthinkability of Black Affect." Critical Ethnic Studies 3, no. 2 (2017): 31–56. Page 43.
[68] Henrice Altink. *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Page 134.
[69] See Annette Gordon-Reed and W. Caleb McDaniel for enslaved women's experience in the legal system.
[70] Moten, 12

force of her terror, she forces us and her torturers to reckon with "[her] humanity, even as it was being degraded."[71] "The (phono-photo-porno-)graphic disruption the shriek carries out" in the archive and on the plantation disrupts accepted forms of aural responses to subjection, cutting through colonial demands for silence with a voiced female call to pain and subjectivity.[72] Defined as mother to several children and a wife, the unnamed woman's screams demand recognition for her humanity. Through her screams, she insisted upon her own humanity, suggesting that, perhaps, "every tone [is] a testimony against slavery."[73]

Whiteley's words are the woman's "only defense of her existence," as she is unnamed and unidentified by any other markers, but his account is "less about understanding the enslaved female subjects or their agony and more about showing the moral outrage of the white male witness and the depravity of the abuser."[74][75] Thus, Whiteley's representation necessitates interrogation; we must ask, does this unnamed woman's cries exist beyond the abolitionist text's utility of her pain? In short, yes. It is important that one recognizes and acknowledges this woman beyond the spectacle and event of her subjection, that one places her scream in the larger schema of a Jamaica on the brink. Just as we must understand Jamaica "in the communities and context from which they appear," we too must understand the world of this unnamed woman. We must turn briefly to the everyday. In the quotidian, there existed the "daily tug-of-war over labor and culture…private, concealed, and even intimate worlds" that we, as scholars, may never be privy to.[76][77] There exists, beyond our reach, the irretrievable lives of enslaved people, and the

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[71] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 142.
[72] Moten, 14
[73] Farah Jasmine Griffin. "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality." Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Page 109.
[74] Saidiya V. Hartman. 2007. Lose your mother: a journey along the Atlantic slave route. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Page 137.
[75] Fuentes, 139
[76] Camp, 2
[77] Camp, 3

woman in Whiteley's text was in possession of one such life. Her life was rich, no doubt, with the workings of community, of family, of connections to others. Another moment of speculation. Consider the sounds of the market, that special place of provisioning where "slaves' material pursuits were conjoined with cultural exchange."[78] Representing "a precious and time-honored autonomous space in their otherwise oppressive routine," the space of the market provided opportunities for Afro-Jamaican women like the unnamed woman to fashion communal bonds, to extend networks of kin, or perhaps even to argue.[79] The market was an example of what Camp, drawing on Edward Said, has deemed a rival geography, "alternative ways of knowing and using plantation and southern space that conflicted with planters' ideals and demands."[80] While Camp's study took the Southern US as its focus, this in no way renders her argument and concept inadmissible to the space of the Caribbean. Utilizing the concept of a rival geography, it becomes easier to locate the enslaved woman of Whiteley's text and her voice beyond the scope of her pain. A rival geography and its associated ideals and practices of autonomy facilitates a rhetorical and imaginative *expansion* of the unnamed woman's world so as to divorce her from her perpetuous association with New Ground Estate and the site of her subjection. Perhaps, in the market, she spoke to others, parried laughter and snark, displacing a voice borne to us by pain to another, more imaginative place. Through an understanding of her world beyond toiling, perhaps we come closer to viewing her scream as not rigidity but possibility.

But in the world that we are presented, one much less speculative, the woman appears to us in a horrid scene of subjection. In the 12th scene, on the space of the plantation and in Jamaican society, "such game requires, above all, some thinking about the opposition of

[78] Natasha Lightfoot. . Troubling freedom: Antigua and the aftermath of British emancipation. 2015. Page 58.
[79] Lightfoot, 58
[80] Camp, 5

spectacle and routine, violence and pleasure."[81] Existing in a society defined by "exceeding immorality and licentiousness," relations between the planter class and enslaved women were, Whiteley related, "a thing which they must *wink at*."[82] It is unto this degraded erotic playground that the enslaved woman existed. This hypersexual landscape raises questions about Whiteley's account of the woman's form, as he writes the act of flogging in sexualized terms. Whiteley depicts the woman "moaning loudly" as she "writhed and twisted her body violently under the infliction."[83] Whiteley's positioning of the woman's punishment, directly after he writes that "flogging no longer affected me to the very painful degree that I at first experienced," places a rhetorical and narrative burden onto this woman centuries later.[84] The unnamed woman's subjection—the sight of her lacerated, disfigured, "somewhat plump" body—becomes the extraordinary, "inhumanly severe" form of violence that brings her into archival view.[85] In his account of this enslaved woman's subjugation, Whiteley reproduces the same ungendering process of sexualization that turns body to flesh and flesh to sexual and laboring commodity. "Her gown and shift were literally torn from her back, and, thus brutally exposed," Whiteley writes, her nakedness a defining feature of her appearance.[86] Whiteley's account of the naked woman's bareness both perpetuates and criticizes the vulgar, eroticized nature of flogging in slave society. To quote an anonymous 1829 writer, there was a belief that, in the act of whipping, some found "pleasurable titillation excited in colonial men by the exercise of the constitutional right of the flogging of women."[87] Here, Marisa J. Fuentes in the "Venus" chapter of

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[81] Moten, 2
[82] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 19.
[83] Whiteley. Excessive cruelty to slaves, 9.
[84] Ibid, 7.
[85] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 9.
[86] Whiteley. Excessive cruelty to slaves, 8.
[87] The Death Warrant of Negro Slavery throughout the British Dominions, London: Hatchard, 1829, p. 33.

Dispossessed Lives provides a useful framework for engagement, writing, "The violated women enter our view in a tortured state, their genitals exposed to voyeurs, without a name, a future, or a past."[88] This visual accounting for the body reproduces a pornotropic view of an enslaved woman's body, even in its call for abolition. The unnamed woman's flesh, cut and whipped fifty times, becomes an auditory and visual testament to pain. In his depiction of her subjection, Whiteley "deflects the violence of slavery onto enslaved women and enacts a form of archival violence," a rhetorical harm not unseen in the genre of abolitionist texts.[89]

Whiteley, as do other abolitionists, reads the scene of whipping from a lens of Victorian sensibilities.[90] In his text and view, the unnamed woman was not just a "married woman" but someone concerned with "matronly modesty," wherein the only time she cries out and is rendered literate is in response to the uncovering of her body.[91] After the woman "set up a shriek," she then "craved permission to tie some covering round her nakedness," deliberately penned in an appeal to Victorian sensibilities of modesty and sexual purity.[92] Despite her request, ultimately futile in its inception, "her gown and shift were literally torn from her back," as Whiteley depicts an eroticized and violent force that bares her body indecently. Again, the woman only cried out, "entreating that her nakedness (her parts of shame) might not be indecently exposed."[93]

Further, positioning the woman as both mother and wife, Whiteley appeals to the British public by emphasizing the woman's position in a family network. He entreats to the public her

[88] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 18.
[89] Fuentes, 137
[90] Henrice Altink. *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
[91] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 9.
[92] Forman, Cody Lisa. "The Politics of Illegitimacy in an Age of Reform: Women, Reproduction, and Political Economy in England's New Poor Law of 1834". Women's History. 2000. 11 (4): 131–156.
[93] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 9.

humanity through her connections to a vital kinship network.[94] Put another way, the unnamed woman is made legible through a heterosexual, Western view of femininity. Scholar Stephanie K. Camp writes, “Women, as a group, were enmeshed in networks of extended family and friends,” and it is this centrality to the black family emphasized by Whiteley in his accounting of the unnamed woman’s whipping.[95] Altink writes, “antislavery writers articulated more particularly a concern about slave women’s ability to sustain and improve the moral qualities of their husbands and children.”[96] The unnamed enslaved woman is incapable of existing alone as a solitary person and must be, instead, represented in reference to her offspring. And indeed, when considering that “subjection was anchored in black women’s reproductive capacities,” Whiteley’s representation of the woman in reference to her children underscores her maternal capacity, even as it is negated and alienated by the condition of enslavement.[97] Further, Whiteley filters the woman’s encounter with violence through a lens of shame and modesty, writing of “her parts of shame,” imposing English standards onto the enslaved woman’s body, hyperbolically stating that she was suffering more from “her account of her indecent exposure, than the cruel laceration of her body.”[98] Whitely’s sexually-invocative representation “combined with the aggressive sexualized discourse consolidated white (colonial) patriarchal power,” and it is this representational and authorial power that this chapter challenges.

Reading the text superficially, there are many things about the unnamed woman that remain irretrievable and impossible to know. (This epistemic impossibility is further discussed in

[94] Analysis of Harriet Jacobs’ “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” provides a framework for analyzing abolitists texts through a heterosexual lens. See Doherty, Thomas. "Harriet Jacobs' Narrative Strategies: "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl"." The Southern Literary Journal 19, no. 1 (1986): 79-91.

[95] Stephanie M. H. Camp. 2004. *Closer to freedom: enslaved women and everyday resistance in the plantation South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Page 37.

[96] Henrice Altink. *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Page 132.

[97] Hartman, Belly of the World, 138

[98] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 9.

Chapter Two.) We know neither her name nor her age. The woman is, in speech, largely illegible, at first marked by replies which Whiteley—whether a linguistic rupture or one more personal—"did not clearly understand."[99] In his depiction of the unnamed woman, Whiteley invokes our senses. We hear her cries and see her bareness. We must, as readers, bear witness to her, the spectacle, the way he does. In his renderings of her cries, we must work against his determining narrative to unbury her life and person.[100] Reading this extraordinary scene of violence, we must ask ourselves, as Fuentes does, "What does it mean to listen to this moment of anguish and suffering as an act of historical defiance? Is there something in the despair of their screams that conjures a powerful subjectivity that permeates the fortress of the archive?"[101] Reading for the sounds of Whiteley;s unnamed woman can—in the larger practice of slavery studies—allow for expanded spaces of interpretation that further uncovers the reality of narratives largely ignored or unheard. "Encrypted" narratives do not mean impossible.[102] What is buried in the violence—and in the shriek of a tortured mother—does not preclude the archival encounter from meaning but instead posits her subjection as "not ultimately heroic, but simply human."[103]

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[99] Henry Whiteley. 1833. Excessive cruelty to slaves : three months in Jamaica in 1832 : comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar plantation. [London]: Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. Page 8.
[100] Whiteley. Excessive cruelty to slaves, 8.
[101] Marisa J. Fuentes. Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive. PHILADELPHIA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Page 142.
[102] Brian Connolly, and Marisa Fuentes. "Introduction: From Archives of Slavery to Liberated Futures?" History of the Present 6, no. 2 (2016): page 4.
[103] Fuentes, 142

"This Woman's Work:" *Silence, Emancipation, and the Savages*

Silence is just as likely to indicate the most profound ideas forming, the deepest energies being summoned.

—Kazuo Ishiguro

As an entry into this project's exploration of Jamaican-American writer Michelle Cliff's 1984 bildungsroman *Abeng*, I begin with this: ruminations on silence from British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*. Arguing against silence as unproductive or peculiar, this particular passage asserts silence as that which, rather than being negation or the absence of sound, can instead be, in and of itself, an *enunciation*: a generative and embodied process which taps into deeper, more profound energies of contemplation that ultimately contribute to practices of creation and survival. This chapter, through its reading of *Abeng*, departs into this space of silence as a generative process, as that which is neither natural nor passive but indicative of profundity. Moving across the space and time of *Abeng*, this paper reads for moments of colonial silencing and the production of a subaltern class, gendered and classed violences that shape the contour of Clare Savage's life, and an intertextual play between the Caribbean and the Holocaust. Silence—here in opposition to the previous chapter's focus on sound and abolitionist discourse—emerges as an impetus and engine for survival for Afro-Jamaican women. Understanding, as Simon Gikandi states, that "the fragmentation, silence, and repression that mark the life of the Caribbean subject under colonialism must be confronted not only as a problem to be overcome but also as a condition of possibility," *Abeng* intervenes in this space of coloniality, writing of a nation on the verge, shaped by legacies and the trauma of slavery.[104]

[104] Gikandi, Simon. "Narration at the Postcolonial Moment: History and Representation in Abeng." In Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature, 231–51. Cornell University Press, 1992. Page 234.

Grounded in the work of Jamaica woman writer Michelle Cliff, this chapter locates silence as both a process and tool that is at once complex, generational, and deliberately produced by Afro-Jamaican women. Engaging the figure of the subaltern woman, this chapter investigates the multitudes of silences found throughout *Abeng*, first in the production of colonial silences and the text's subsequent reclamation of Indigenous and African histories and second, in the deliberate silence of *Abeng*'s maternal figures.

To begin this hefty project, however, requires a robust understanding of the time spanning our previous exploration of violence in 1832 to *Abeng*'s placement in Jamaica in 1958. In particular, this historical move necessitates an understanding of freedom and slavery across the long durée. In the 1830s, to be freed under the supposed auspices of British abolitionism was, ultimately, to be incomplete, as freedom had to be *eased into* for enslaved people, first through apprenticeship and second in the limited living conditions of total emancipation. In the aftermath of emancipation locates a larger, more complex practice of self-making and community that forces one to ask: what *is* freedom? Is freedom, simply put, the opposite of enslavement? Or is freedom constructed, cast as something natural and essential to liberalism while instead is produced and managed through social, communal, and economic mores? Taking Pre-Independence Jamaica as this chapter's focus elucidates the workings of freedom and emancipation in an effort to unmask freedom "as an artifact of history," as that which has been fashioned and constructed.[105] Similarly caught in this tension, the struggle to define freedom indicates a larger struggle to define enslavement and represent what *Abeng* deems "the limits of the abolition of slavery."[106] As metaphors, the space between free and enslaved is a powerful signifier of bondage and selfhood—but beyond the metaphorical, for the formerly enslaved in

[105] Holt, Thomas C. The Problem of Freedom: race, labor, and politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938. Baltimore, Md: J. Hopkins University Press, 1992. Page 7.
[106] Michelle Cliff. Abeng. New York: Plume. 1984. Page 28.

Jamaica existed the lived memory of plantation slavery, what literary scholar H. Adlai Murdoch has deemed "the twin terrors of colonialism and slavery" and for following generations, there existed the contested experience of life after emancipation and the workings of race, colorism, and class.[107] Locating discourses of freedom and slavery in the political and social struggle for emancipation recalls two primary agents: policymakers whose debates decided the political machinations of emancipation and the formerly enslaved apprentices and free masses who actualized freedom in their every day practices. *Abeng* contends with this history, representing the move from enslavement, which "had become an inconvenience," to a free, wage labor society.[108] Cliff further writes, "Slavery-in-fact was abolished, and the freedom which followed on abolition turned into veiled slavery, the model of the rest of the western world," unmasking—in fact, *unveiling*—the maintenance of slavery in the post-abolition schema.[109] The shift from enslaved to free occasioned the production of a poor, subordinate, working class as the machinations of empire, which once functioned as the thrust behind continued enslavement, "now worked to keep them poor."[110] Cliff continues, "And poor most of them remained."[111] Investigating the post-emancipation era's maintenance of a racialized, uneven society where ideas about Black inferiority colored policy and economic access, perhaps *Abeng* puts it best when Cliff writes, "the politics of freedmen paled beside the politics of commonwealth," resulting in the presence and production of a subaltern class whose interests were located beyond the purview and discretion of colonial administration.[112]

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[107] Murdoch, H. Adlai. "A Legacy of Trauma: Caribbean Slavery, Race, Class, and Contemporary Identity in 'Abeng.'" Research in African Literatures 40, no. 4 (2009): 65–88. Page 67.
[108] Cliff, 29
[109] Cliff, 29
[110] Cliff, 29
[111] Cliff, 29
[112] Cliff, 31

This is the world of economic and racial inequality—represented in the text as color stratification and varying access to land—with which *Abeng* contends. British colonialism, especially, emerges thematically and recurrently within the text, as Cliff attempts to represent a Jamaica on the precipice of "independence-in-practically-name-only," at once underscoring the incomplete, nominal nature of independence and Jamaica's continued reliance on Britain and larger international bodies such as the World Bank and IMF.[113] Grappling with the Caribbean by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it," the British effectively cast Afro-Jamaicans as the Other, insofar as the Other is surveilled, constituted by, and managed by British rule.[114] Lest Jamaica became too unruly, the British turned to the importation of British cultural mores for societal control in efforts to import civilization to the "overwhelmingly" Black island.[115] Within *Abeng*, this is best exemplified by the importation of the harpsichord to John Knox Memorial Church, the preferred place of worship by protagonist Clare Savage's white father Boy and other middle-class Jamaicans. John Knox is a place where "the hymns seemed to suggest a historical and almost equal relationship with the idea of God," positing colonialism and religion as intrinsically and inextricably tied.[116] This equal relationship suggested and provided justification for the subsequent violence that accompanied British settler-colonialism. Of the harpsichord, functioning here as colonialism's metonym, the text writes, "The instrument had never adjusted to the climate," marking an epistemological disjuncture between the colonial instrument and Jamaica's native climate, more generally representing a perpetual fissure between indigeneity and colonial importation.[117] This disjuncture is furthered within the text when considering the role of silence and quiet. The

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[113] Cliff, 5
[114] Edward W. Said. Orientalism. New York: Pantheon Books.1978. Page 3.
[115] Cliff, 5
[116] Cliff, 6
[117] Cliff, 6

harpsichord, even in the most ideal climate, was not meant "to accompany a hundred voices."[118] Indeed, the text proposes, "English people must sing softer—or not at all" in order to appreciate the harpsichord.[119] In the figure of the harpsichord, one sees tensions emerge between the colonial displacement of British culture and the real presence of Jamaica's Creole population. Further, when considering the Scottish schoolteacher's advice to the congregation that they "consider the nuances of harmony and quiet" in deference to the harpsichord, silence and quiet emerge as tools of colonial silencing, displacing a colonial need for silence onto the soundings of the middle-class, Jamaican congregation.[120]

When grappling with this metonymic form of colonial silencing and displacement, *Abeng*'s structure—at once part textbook, part personal narrative—must be probed to underscore and unveil the thematic function of the shifting prose. Drawing on her own life, *Abeng* is also autobiographical and, as is the case with "autobiographical mythologies of empowerment…are usually mediated by a desire to revise and rewrite official, recorded history."[121] This project's deliberate invocation of the word *textbook* lies in Cliff's attempts to "dismantle notions of "official" history and the relation of that history to myth," foregrounding a revisionist view of history as the text mixes the narrative forms of bildungsroman, autobiography, and textual accounting of history.[122] Then, both coming-of-age and revisionist textbook highlighting Jamaica's hidden African and Indigenous histories, *Abeng* confronts and challenges colonial silence by "[breaking] with textual and colonial authority to value myriad knowledges" while understanding that "ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied

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[118] Cliff, 6
[119] Cliff, 6
[120] Cliff, 6
[121] Lionnet, Françoise. "Of Mangoes and Maroons: Language, History, and the Multicultural Subject of Michelle Cliff's Abeng." In Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity, 22–47. Cornell University Press, 1995. Page 22.
[122] Edmondson, Belinda. "Race, privilege, and the politics of (re)writing history: an analysis of the novels of Michelle Cliff." Callaloo 16, no. 1 (1993): Page 185.

without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied," as the text undertakes an accounting of history that is power-oriented, contending with the thrust and unevenness of the force of the British colonial encounter.[123][124] *Abeng*, however, begins not with Christopher Columbus's 1494 "discovery" of the island nor with the implementation of Spanish rule in the dying 15th-century nor with the British consolidation of power on the island in 1655. Instead, the text commences after a brief geological accounting of history, of the times "the island rose and sank," subsequently professing to be a book about the time that follows, when the island was transformed into "a place where people lived. Indians. Africans. Europeans."[125] This tri-fold account of Jamaica's demographics speaks to the specific form of colorful, hybrid, creolized history that constitutes Jamaican culture and is further reflected in its representation of the island's sovereign crest of "an Arawak Indian and a white conqueror," though, the text is quick to note, "only one of these existed in 1958."[126] Though unwritten, explicit to the reader is the memory and dwindling population of Jamaica's Arawak people. In this way, *Abeng* stakes a claim to the memory of the Arawak and bears witness to the process of their genocide, and in moments like this—as the text grapples with the disappearing figure of the Native—textual reclamation of Indigenous and African histories functions as the text's vehicle towards a revision of colonial history. Simon Gikandi writes, "the value of Abeng, as a self-consciously revisionist text, does not lie solely in what it exhibits, but also in the absent or unspoken aspects of the Caribbean experience which it uncovers from under official rhetoric."[127]

In another instance and throughout the earlier portion of the text, much attention is paid to the mythology of Jamaican folk figure Nanny Maroon, figuring her iconography as

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[123] Yates-Richard, 34
[124] Said, 3
[125] Cliff, 3
[126] Cliff, 5
[127] Gikandi, 241

fundamental to Jamaican history through the text's insistence that "there is absolutely no doubt she actually existed."[128] Cliff's focus on Nanny exists at odds with colonial renderings of Jamaica history, as Gikandi writes, "[Nanny's] presence is negated in official versions of history because she threatens Jamaica's foundational narrative, which would prefer to trace its sources to Europe rather than Africa."[129] Understanding this, then, by textually appropriating the historical figure and significance of Nanny, Cliff grounds *Abeng* in a history of resistance to slavery while recovering a lost, hidden history that remains unknown to the Jamaican population, some of whom "were called Nanny, because they cared for the children of other women, but they did not know who Nanny had been."[130] Through the figure of a rebellious woman, Cliff immediately marks central to *Abeng* notions of African female resistance, as this "gender affirmation and cultural identity [resulted] in a discursive emphasis not only on the substantive role played by slavery in Jamaica's colonial development, but the parallel role played by women in the struggle against it" (Murdoch 78). Cliff also grounds the larger schema of Afro-Jamaican genealogy in the history of Nanny and her sister Sekesu, writing, "Nanny fled slavery; Sekesu remained a slave…it was believed that all island children were descended from one or the other."[131] By grounding Jamaica's history in the figure of an African-born sorceress, the text expands upon Stuart Hall's assertion that "Africa is the name of the missing term, the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning which, until recently, it lacked."[132] Murdoch also notes that "the inescapable fact of their blackness had always marked tangible and material link with their origins in Africa."[133] Marking the history of Nanny and Sekesu as essential to understanding the composition of Afro-Jamaican people, the text constructs a divide

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[128] Cliff, 15
[129] Gikandi, 245
[130] Cliff, 21
[131] Cliff, 18
[132] Hall, 224
[133] Murdoch, 66

between resistance, seen in the figure of Nanny, and complacency, witnessed in the figure of Sekesu. This paper attempts to trouble the notion that resistance and complacency exist on a natural divide, suggesting instead that there is a space between, a hybridity that troubles the very meaning of resistance itself. Further, by tracing a shared genealogy back to either Nanny or Sekesu, the text locates its Afro-Jamaican subjects as those who can, on either side, "trace their bloods back to a past of slavery," underscoring the importance of geneology, history, and the legacies of slavery in a complex society riddled with tensions of impoverishment, patriarchy, and racism. The text's explicit reference to the legacy of slavery stands at odds with Afro-Jamaican people's knowledge of their own histories, as slavery "was not something they talked about much, or knew much about," underlining an epistemological gap between known and hidden histories.[134] In *Abeng* comes to bear Belinda Edmondson's assertion that "in colonial and much of post-colonial Jamaica, Jamaicans lived without knowledge of their past—they lived with absence."[135] This project attempts to reorient this absence as instead a produced, deliberate *silencing* through colonial administration, education, and lost histories. As the history of slavery is positioned subaltern to colonial accounts of Jamaica, this in turn marks as subterranean and unimportant slave geneologies, resulting in a fundamental epistemic and natal alienation. The text further foregrounds this lack of knowing as Cliff writes over the course of a passage, "The congregation did not know that African slaves in Africa had been primarily hosuehold servants… these people did not know… No one had told the people in the Tabernacle… They did not know," with the repetition of *did not know* implicating a sort of *anti-episteme* where the *not knowing* is fundamental to constructing an image of Jamaica's slave-descended population.[136] This not knowing, Murdoch asserts, "is a form of epistemic violence, in that being denied such

[134] Cliff, 19
[135] Edmondson, 187
[136] Cliff, 20

knowledge means being denied at least the basis for the articulation, validation and valorization of identity."[137] *Abeng*'s emphasis on what Jamaica's Black population did not know underscores the text's attempts at reclaiming hidden histories, as this forgetting of history—this form of lost memory—is figured as a deliberate product of colonial education, an education which stressed, of course, "the history of English monarchs…the history of Jamaica as it pertained to England," eliding, perhaps even disappearing, histories of slavery, resistance, and all which did not contribute to the production of an Anglicizied class of people.[138] Again I build upon Murdoch's claim that "this selective excising of historical fact was also integral to the maintenance of the colonial landscape" by reorienting a reading of *Abeng* to the colonial use of silence.[139]

Bearing witness to the administration of colonial education and rule, while also laying claim to and recovering hidden, subaltern histories, *Abeng* is more than textbook—it is also the personal narrative of 12-year-old, middle class, light-skinned girl Clare Savage, grounding the text's didactic relationship to memory in the lived experience of Clare. Similar to the divide between Nanny and Sekesu, *Abeng* constructs a world where protagonist Clare Savage must navigate a world severed, torn asunder between the charmed, but troubled life of town and the more traditional, rural upbringing of life in the country. Torn, as it were, between "her mother or her father…the Black or the white," Clare's life is structured around difference and opposition, and soon, " a choice would be expected of her."[140] Jennifer Morgan contends that "Atlantic slavery rested upon a notion of heritability."[141] On both sides, then, Clare's inheritance is the uneven histories of possession and dispossession, a legacy of slave-owning and enslavement. *Abeng* presents a narrative of historical memory and resistance, as the text's retrospective

[137] Murdoch, 78
[138] Cliff, 84
[139] Murdoch, 78
[140] Cliff, 37
[141] Jennifer L. Morgan; Partus sequitur ventrem: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery. Small Axe, 1 March 2018; 22 (1 (55)): 1–17. Page 1.

relationship to memory also functions to uncover the hidden history of Clare's genealogy, as the text unveils what Murdoch observes as "an occulted family tree now more myth than reality."[142] Not just textbook or coming-of-age, the text is also the personal history of the Savage and Freeman families.

The product of a silent, restrained mother and an aggrandizing, drunk father, Clare's histories unfold over the course of the novel, as she grapples with the fact that "the background could slide so easily into the foreground."[143] In other words, so easily could the past color her present—and so it did, in a society deeply rooted in the resonant afterlife of slavery and the ongoing process of colonization. Beginning primarily with an accounting of the Savage family whose name hints at a murkier, less-white ancestry than presumed by Clare's father, in a particularly generative moment within the text, Boy takes Clare to the ironically-named Paradise Plantation, a troubled site once owned by the Savages that, by 1958, is in the process of being converted into a subdivision for vacation homes and was once the site of a slave massacre. When Clare asks if the two can enter the Great House, a site so "dingy and mindful of the past," Boy responds, "I don't see why not; after all, it did belong to us once," reflecting a sense of entitlement and historical possession that defines Boy's view of himself, his lineage, and, ultimately, Clare.[144] Walking through "what was once a great home" and gazing upon the architectural remnants of the plantation's industry, Clare stood "not knowing the former life they represented."[145] Echoing the anti-episteme of the Tabernacle's congregation, Clare remains unaware to her ancestry, as Cliff's preoccupation with the past performs a recovery of Clare's history while also signifying a temporal schema where time is marked by before and after

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[142] Murdoch, 77
[143] Cliff, 25
[144] Cliff, 24
[145] Cliff, 27

emancipation. Sitting so closely with Clare's history, Cliff's recovery of the figure of Indian slave Inez "who was brought up on charges of the theft of a rifle and some ammunition" foretells Clare's own moment of rebellion later in the novel, a momentous event discussed later in this section.[146]

Clare's mixed-race heritage and the text's opposition of Black and white further locates race as an instrument of colonialism, in a world where "only sadness comes from mixture."[147] In the figure of Boy Savage, he possesses an awareness of status and race that locates the Savages as a white family of power, his belief in the greatness and prestige of the Savage family prompting him to assure Clare of her whiteness because "she was a true Savage."[148] This correlation between the Savages and whiteness is linguistically and historically undercut by the memory of Indian genocide and the colonial encounter's figuring of Jamaica's indigenous people as the Other or as racialized *savages*. Indeed, Cliff is as deliberate in the naming of Clare's opposing sides—Savage and Freeman—as she is in the text's representation of space. Cliff's distinct opposition between town and country, just as the opposition between the Black and white, "created the background for the whole of [Clare's] existence. And the places reflected the separate needs and desires of the two parents."[149] From here, Cliff, and this chapter, moves into an exploration of life in the country—the rural parish of St. Elizabeth—where "there was an absolute stillness" and where "sound traveled far."[150]. In this figuring of St. Elizabeth as still, the text foregrounds not just silence but a gendered way of living that dictates Clare's behaviors in the rural parish. When in the country, Clare is reared by her grandmother Miss Mattie who, as a woman of faith and propriety, and with her strict adherence to gender roles, did not permit boys,

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[146] Cliff, 34
[147] Cliff, 164
[148] Cliff, 46
[149] Cliff, 49
[150] Cliff, 92

including Clare's cousins, "to be where her granddaughter was."[151] So restricted by gender, Clare is relegated to the space of the home, of women. Miss Mattie imposes a strict level of respectability and femininity onto Clare, as Clare becomes even more isolated from her cousins when the boys tell her that their fun and games "no fe gal dem," reflective of a life where gender defines life conditions and the bounds of acceptable behavior.[152] In this instance, Clare's isolation from her cousins and the agentive freedom of masculinity is not enacted solely by Miss Mattie but is reinforced by the boys themselves. Miss Mattie's strict imposition of gendered roles onto her young granddaughter, in turn abridging her mobility and agency, further comes to bear in a moment of hog slaughter, where the hog's throat is slit "by the boys' father" and kept removed from Clare as she "had been ordered by Miss Mattie not to watch."[153] Miss Mattie's control of Clare's sight and access to the slaughter, while implementing no such limits on Joshua and Ben who "had even been a part of it," polices Clare separately from her cousins, by way of her gender.

The experience of this earlier hog slaughter provides context to life in the country, where families depend on their own kills for sustenance. "Slaughter was not new to [Clare]," Cliff writes.[154] Each time a violent act of killing appears within the text, the slaughter asserts new ideals around masculinity and femininity. Within these killings, gender and patriarchy are inscribed into both the act and the way these acts are received by the family and greater country community. Through an anecdote about wild bird and chicken killings, the text notes the "wild" nature of the bird killings and how, upon the return of Ben and his father, who had done the killing, "much was made of the return."[155] Through Cliff's use of the word "trophies" in the

[151] Cliff, 56
[152] Cliff, 57
[153] Cliff, 56
[154] Cliff, 115
[155] Cliff, 115

following paragraph, the text describes the killings undertaken by men as received publicly and with fanfare, in contrast to the women's killing of chickens, which is usually done "out of sight."[156] Cliff juxtaposes this popular reception of wild bird killings with the hidden killing of chickens, constructing the women's work as more "routine" than the glory-filled, arduous work of men.[157] The text further emphasizes that the chickens lacked "the smell of a wild habitat about them."[158] Here, the delineation between the killing of something wild and the killing of old fowl like "Bessy or Vinnie," whose given names assist rhetorically in the devaluing and discrediting of women's work, uphold patriarchy and the acute gender imbalance that informs Clare's way of life in the country. The masculinist nature of hog slaughter exists in contrast to the feminine nature of more routine, chicken killings, and it is unto this background of patriarchy and gender imbalance that Clare decides to hunt and kill a wild hog, taking "a gun and ammunition" and, through this destabilizing act, steps "far out of place," flouting traditional norms about gender and respectability.[159] The violence of slaughter itself is not extraordinary—rather, it is commonplace in rural Jamaica, as I have shown—but what is extraordinary is that Clare's actions are an attempt at mimicking masculinity, mirroring the acts of violence she has seen enacted previously. Clare's desire to slaughter a wild hog with a gun challenges and destabilizes patriarchal conceptions of gender and labor through violence and machinery. Clare, like her forebearer Inez, committed "the theft of a rifle and some ammunition."[160] It is important to note that while Ben and his father killed wild birds through protracted hunting and the shooting of a gun, while women killed chickens "quickly and cleanly, barehanded."[161] Through this distinction

[156] Cliff, 115
[157] Cliff, 115
[158] Cliff, 115
[159] Cliff, 114
[160] Cliff, 34
[161] Cliff, 115

of a barehanded killing done by women, Clare's theft of the gun becomes an extraordinary act in which she challenges the gender status quo through phallic, machine-enacted violence.[162]

Country, as well as being a place defined by strict gender roles and violence, possessed a dreamlike openness to Clare and her closest friend Zoe, who was "as tall as Clare, and darker," Zoe's darkness and lower class are a marker of the intra-race difference within Jamaican society that crystallized in Post-Emancipation Jamaica. As children, the girls "had childhood—they had make-believe. They had a landscape which was wild and real and filled with places in which their imaginations could move," constructing an imagined and lived space defined by the open space of adolescence.[163] Memory, again, appears as Cliff continues, "The real world—that is, the world outside the country—could be just as dreamlike as the world of make-believe—on this island which did not know its own history," the *anti-episteme* of earlier re-emerging to construct an island bereft of the knowledge of its own history.[164] This is the result of colonial silence. Clare's make-believe world, however, does not exist divorced from the world of colorism and class which marks a fission within Jamaica's Black society. In a particularly violent instance in the text, as darker-skinned classmate Doreen Paxton suffers an epileptic seizure in front of the entire student body and administration, "the headmistress sang louder."[165] Cliff continues, "the girls…must work to cover the sound of Doreen's face and skull hitting against rock, and the low groans coming from inside her," performing a reorienting to silence that presupposes darker-skinned Black people's suffering as natural and uncontested.[166] Paradoxically, through sound, the headmistress attempts to silence a darker-skinned girl's soundings of her suffering. Within this same school system, one influenced by British missionaries, "punishment between

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[162] Cliff, 115
[163] Cliff, 95
[164] Cliff, 96
[165] Cliff, 97
[166] Cliff, 97

the girls was meted out by sending someone to Coventry—the English name for the silent treatment," and here, silence undergoes a transformation as it becomes a vehicle for community control and management.[167] With Zoe, however, who attended a different school than Clare because of her class and lower station in life, "talk or silence was not their primary means of settling their disagreements."[168] No, instead, "they fought each other," marking physical violence, not silence, as the motor for their interpersonal disagreements.[169]

This is the world of the country that *Abeng* creates and, Cliff wants the reader to know, this is the domain of Clare's mother, Kitty Savage, who "came alive only in the bush."[170] Together with the assertion that "all Jamaican families were old families," the text posits a sort of female *knowing* that stands in contrast to the earlier Tabernacle congregation's *not-knowing*.[171] Cliff writes of Kitty, "she knew about Sleep-and-Wake… she knew about Jessamy… she knew…" the *knowing* transformed into a refrain that speaks to a larger schema of traditional Afro-Jamaican spiritual and survival practices rooted in the figure of the woman, casting, as Edmondson observes, "Kitty—and indeed all black women in this novel—as having a direct and unmediated linkage to a positive black history and consciousness."[172][173] What Kitty knows, however, is kept secret and silent from Clare, denying Clare "her Africanness by concealing her own blackness and family history"—and it is within Kitty's silences that one is able to locate the complex, dual practice of withholding affect and knowledge while simultaneously wielding silence as a weapon.[174] In the figure of Kitty, Kevin Quashie's claim that "the interior— dynamic and ravishing—is a stay against the dominance of the social world; it has its own sovereignty"

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[167] Cliff, 101
[168] Cliff, 101
[169] Cliff, 101
[170] Cliff, 49
[171] Cliff, 54
[172] Cliff, 53
[173] Edmondson, 188
[174] Murdoch, 81

comes to bear.[175] Of puberty, the text notes, "Kitty had not told [Clare], nor would she," exemplifying a relationship between mother and child that is held back and distant.[176] Indeed, "with her children Kitty was restrained—in both anger and warmth."[177] Within the text, this deliberate use of silence and withholding of affect becomes Kitty's way of protecting herself, even at the expense of her daughters, who "rarely saw her cry."[178] Kitty's refusal and disavowal of affect thusly colored Clare's own understandings of her gender and ability to express emotion, echoing her mother when Cliff writes, "[Clare] hated to cry and she hated now that she couldn't control her tears—she was acting like a girl," and again, a moment later when "[Clare] had to quiet her sobs" in a world where "the girl children were small replicas of the women," marking the passing down of silence as that which is generational.[179][180]

Kitty's silences and her parenting are intrinsic to each other, often with Kitty choosing deference—silence—to Boy, "something expected of a woman married to a man."[181] During one instance, "as Boy lectured about color, Kitty said little," not challenging her husband's racism, despite her holding "darkness near."[182] Kitty's silence recurs throughout, seen as Boy and Kitty grapple with what punishment to mete out for Clare's decision to steal the gun, as Cliff writes, "Boy handled all the details, but Kitty complied with the decision totally."[183] In Kitty, one gets a sense of Sekesu. Indeed, the text writes, "to reckon with her father's culpability would also mean reckoning with her mother's silences—and to see how silence can become complicity."[184] In this project and within the text, however, silence is not defined solely by complicity. As posited by

[175] Quashie, 6
[176] Cliff, 106
[177] Cliff, 52
[178] Cliff, 52
[179] Cliff, 58
[180] Cliff, 11
[181] Cliff, 76
[182] Cliff, 127
[183] Cliff, 149
[184] Cliff, 76

the text, Kitty Savage understands silence as protection, wearing "her love for Black people—her people—in silence…protecting the depth of this love from all but herself."[185] Kitty, restrained in her love for Blackness, dons quiet like a shield. This quiet, however, "had not always been with her," engendered by a sad "tenderness" and "a love of necessity kept to herself."[186] In contrast to the earlier-discussed colonial silences, Kitty's silences are multifaceted and pointed, as "it was silence that was Kitty's finest weapon—honed carefully over the years of her marriage."[187] Clare, ultimately the product of her parents, must contend with the violence of this marriage. With Kitty and Boy so ill-matched and unsuited for each other, Clare must confront her belief that "violence meant someone had to strike a blow," a notion of violence that is grounded in physicality, accomplishing—completing—violence through its physical embodiment.[188] While Boy and Kitty never hit each other, Clare is forced to "[listen] to her parents screams and shouts."[189] The violent soundings of wife and husband provide an auditory testament to dysfunction and tension between the white and the Black, between man and wife.[190] Clare must mediate her expectations for her parents with her naivety and their actions, the text writing, "Clare tried to make herself sleep…trying to take her mind off the violence—but she said their fights were not violent. And she thought that her father, after all, was a good man."[191] Clare must contend with her mother's silence, functioning here as a complex form of nonlinguistic communication, in a way that allows violence in some ways and protects against it in others. Cliff notes, however, that Kitty's silence is generational, passed down by her own mother Miss Mattie. In one instance, as Miss Mattie awaits her husband's return from town, she listened to the excitement of her children and

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[185] Cliff, 128
[186] Cliff, 128-129
[187] Cliff, 131
[188] Cliff, 51
[189] Cliff, 51
[190] Cliff, 51
[191] Cliff, 52

said "not a word."[192] The text continues, "she didn't speak when she heard his horse ride up. Nor when he staggered through the back door of the house…" [193] If we are to understand silences (and patriarchal gender relations) as generational, then Miss Mattie's relationship with her husband foretold the condition of Boy and Kitty's marriage in much the same way Miss Mattie and Kitty's silences are related down to Clare. In Clare, Kitty, and Miss Mattie before her comes to bear Saidiya Hartman's assertion that "we carry the mother's mark and it continues to define our condition and our present."[194]

To fully probe the multitudes of silences found throughout *Abeng*, I turn to an intertextual discussion of the Holocaust, a historical moment featured prominently in the text through its featuring of the stories of Anne Frank and Kitty Hart, two youngs girls ensnared in a world of hatred and racism, just like Clare. To begin, I turn not to Anne Frank or to Kitty Hart, but to Claudia, a deceased Afro-Jamaican girl whose death from leukemia at a young age inaugurates Clare into the knowledge that young girls, just like herself, can and do die, evinced in the reading of Claudia's obituary, where Clare's anguish existed not "in the fact that a friend or classmate had died, but in the realization…that people of her own age—children—could die."[195] When Clare probes her grandmother about Claudia's death, Miss Mattie responds distantly, withholding information about "the death of her youngest son from measles when he was thirteen" that could potentially help Clare navigate her introduction to the death of adolescents.[196] Understanding silence as a generational tool informs our reading of the information-withholding that defines the relationships between Miss Mattie, Kitty Savage, and Clare—relationships defined by silence. Further, when considering the gravity of Claudia's death, "[Clare's] mind played a trick for her

[192] Cliff, 136
[193] Cliff, 136
[194] Hartman, 168
[195] Cliff, 69
[196] Cliff, 69

that summer, which made the death of another eleven-year-old girl easier to bear."[197] Clare found peace in this erasure, in the silencing of Claudia's death; like it does for her mother, silence functions as protection, even as it erases Claudia, who, it seemed, "had not existed at all."[198] Claudia's erasure stands in direct contrast to Clare's fixation on Anne Frank, who "most certainly had been here" because Anne, unlike Claudia, "had left behind evidence."[199] In Anne Frank, Clare "was reaching, without knowing it, for an explanation of her own life," performing an identification with Anne, a white Jewish girl, that sits at odds with her mind's erasure of Claudia, a young Afro-Jamaican girl.[200] Clare's copy of *The Diary of Anne Frank* solicited from her self-identification in the "small-seeming dark girl" whose death and relationship to her mother forms the locus of Clare's own understanding of her relationship with Kitty Savage. In the narrative of Anne Frank, Clare locates the "remoteness of Anne's mother…restrained by what seemed a combination of dignity and sadness" that echoes her distant, restrained relationship with Kitty.[201] Of Anne's mother, Clare questions, "the source of her coldness…where did her remoteness come from?" and the reader is to understand that these questions could—do—apply to Kitty.[202] In contrast, Clare turns to the narrative of Holocaust survivor Kitty Hart—curiously sharing a name with Kitty Savage—whose mother "stood in contrast to the mother of Anne Frank" and to Clare's own mother.[203] Through Kitty and Anne's mothers, Clare attempts to mediate her own distant relationship with her mother, interrogating, "Did Kitty survive because her mother had confronted the horror and taught her daughter to live through the days?"[204] As Clare contends with Anne's death and Kitty's survival, there is the unwritten question: did Anne

[197] Cliff, 69
[198] Cliff, 69
[199] Cliff, 69
[200] Cliff, 72
[201] Cliff, 80
[202] Cliff, 80
[203] Cliff, 80
[204] Cliff, 80

die because of the remoteness of her mother? Clare's identification with Anne, which "began with [Kitty] and moved outward, to a sympathy," similarly begs the question: would Clare die because of the same remoteness of the mother figure?[205] Kitty's silences chafe against the fact that "Clare did not tell her mother anything which was close to her," imposing an insurmountable, affective distance between the two.[206] Navigating her relationship to her mother through the proxies of Anne Frank and Kitty Hart, Clare's exploration of the Holocaust forces her to wonder: was Kitty's survival the result of her mother's closeness and Anne's death the result of her mother's coldness? Is survival located in the mother-daughter relationship, as it was for Kitty Hart, or do a mother's silences distort and disfigure the form of that relationship beyond recognition and reconciliation? Simply put, is protection afforded by a mother's restraint and silence, or is protection found in voice, in speech, or in more pronounced shows of mother-daughter love?

Understanding that silence within *Abeng* takes the form of protection, erasure, and complicity, this close reading of the text engenders multiple meanings which, when grounded in the work of Michelle Cliff, can elucidate the function of silence as a tool for survival for Afro-Jamaican women. As the freedom found after emancipation was a precarious one, hinging upon freedpeople's efforts at carving out spaces for self-making, this exploration of *Abeng* accounts for violence, patriarchy, and silence as interconnected, and in their interconnectedness, locates broader practices of Afro-Jamaican women in a process of deliberate silence and protection.

[205] Cliff, 80
[206] Cliff, 80

Make-Believe: *a reckoning*

"In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all know what that sound sounded like."—Toni Morrison

At the conclusion of this project, Fred Moten's words provide space for contemplation: "If we return again and again to a certain…passionate response to passionate utterance… an objection, it is because it is more than another violent scene of subjection too terrible to pass on."[207] Simultaneously struck and repulsed as I was by Henry Whiteley's vulgar representation of the unnamed woman, this project was borne of an impetus to recover. Desperately, I grasped at the tethered edges of a woman's existence and *listened in* to her screams and cries from where they were situated beneath the inscription on the page, unearthing an auditory tableau which pulled me into complex histories of sound and silence that called me to investigation. Getting at her screams and encountering her shrieks, I was pulled in, drawn, returning again and again to her twenty-eight lines. Engaging scholars such as Stephanie M.H. Camp, Marisa J. Fuentes, and Belinda Edmondson, this projected attempted to move *into* her screams, performing a rigorous accounting of sound and silence in textual representations of Afro-Jamaican women, seeking to get at a more profound level of the subject even as she is located in an arena of subjection and determining power structures. Reorienting spaces such as the market or Clare's world of make-believe as open spaces of possibility, this project presents that space of openness as a guide to the archival encounter, approaching the documentary archive not as a fixed, rigid space but as one of contestation, befit for the expanse of the scholarly duty and imagination.

First, through its exploration of sound within Henry Whiteley's *Excessive cruelty to slaves: three months in Jamaica in 1832: comprising a residence of seven weeks on a sugar*

[207] Moten, 14

plantation, Chapter One foregrounded sound as a window into the careful consideration of enslaved Black women's subjectivity. Taking one unnamed woman as its focus, the chapter challenged Whiteley's abolitionist representation of her subjection, performing a reimposition of violence through his rhetorical strategies and narrative form. Evoking speculative form and reading the aural in Whiteley's encounter imagines a world where the unnamed woman existed beyond the contorts of pain, situating her in a larger community and kinship network which transformed the space of Pre-Emancipation Jamaica from one defined solely by violence into a space where subjection, rival geographies, and an enslaved woman's sonic objections can exist simultaneously. Moving from Pre-Emancipation Jamaica to a country on the brink of nominal independence, Chapter Two explored the multi-faceted function of silence for Afro-Jamaican women, grounding its argument in a discussion of motherhood, restraint, and protection within Michelle Cliff's novel *Abeng*.

Sorting Shadows exists at the convergence of histories of enslavement, literary studies, and studies of Black women. It is fitting, then, that I draw on one such Black woman at the close. Toni Morrison writes, "In the beginning was the sound, and they all know what that sound sounded like," and it is my hope, upon completion of this project, that we continue the work of recognizing the valences of Black women's soundings and silences, viewing them not as unproductive but as spaces of possibility, spaces of interpretation—of reckoning.[208]

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[208] Toni Morrison, Beloved, Page 305

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