

The University of Hull

**Representations of Slave Women in Discourses of Slavery  
and Abolition, 1780-1838**

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by  
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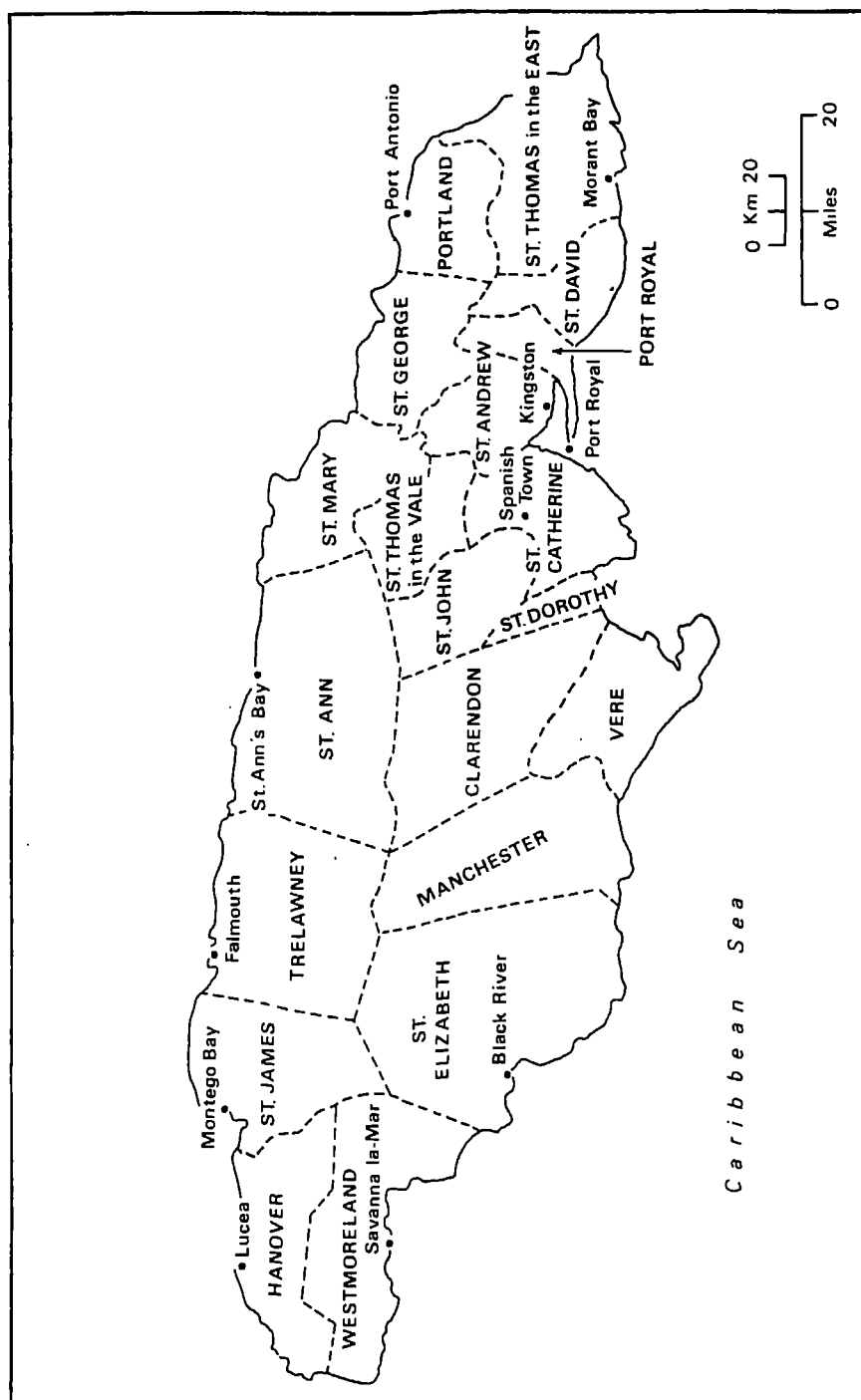


Figure 1. JAMAICA IN 1834

Source: G. J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Oxford: Clio Press), xxi.

## INTRODUCTION

This study analyses the three main debates about Jamaican slave women in the period 1780-1838: slave motherhood, slave women's domestic lives and the corporal punishment of slave women.<sup>1</sup> The principal aim is to demonstrate how abolitionists and colonialists represented slave women to their audiences. The term 'abolitionists' in this study refers not only to active and committed members of the Abolition Society (or from 1823 onwards the Anti-Slavery Society) but also to a large number of people who were not officially linked to the movement but wrote or spoke in support of its cause, such as members of the Colonial Office, several colonial governors and resident missionaries. The term 'colonialists' refers to an even more diverse social group. It consists not only of those who directly benefited from the system of slavery, such as resident planters and members of the West India Committee (a London-based society of West Indian planters and merchants), but also of non-slaveholding residents, visitors to the island and planter-friendly administrators.<sup>2</sup>

British abolitionism emerged as a mass movement at the end of the 1780s and reached several peaks before the end in the 1860s. Several campaigns were waged in this period: for the abolition of the slave trade (1787-1807); for emancipation (1823-1834) and for the end of the Apprenticeship System (1835-38).<sup>3</sup> These campaigns used evidence of the corporal punishments inflicted on slave women, the disregard of their domestic lives and the destruction of their natural tendency to be mothers to arouse the sympathy of a seemingly indifferent public and to demonstrate the extreme

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<sup>1</sup> Slave women also played a role in the debates about slave religion and material consumption. These debates have been omitted to keep the research within limits.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'colonialists' is commonly used in studies on Caribbean slavery to denote those in the colonies and at home who defended the slave system.

<sup>3</sup> A good introduction to the abolitionist movement and its campaigns is R. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988).

moral and social oppressiveness and backwardness of societies based on slavery and the debasement of the elites that maintained and defended it. The centring of slave women within the campaigns was based on the assumption that women were the 'gentler sex' and that the position of women in a society indicated the level of civilisation it had achieved. Or, in the words of the well-known abolitionist William Wilberforce:

The grand test of civilisations and refinement has been the respect in which the female sex has been held, or which is much the same thing, their general condition and treatment.<sup>4</sup>

Slave women were also at the centre of the debate of those who sought to protect and prolong slavery. By the late 1770s slaveholders realised that the fact that women were in a minority in the slave trade and that many had used up some of their fertility potential by the time they arrived, meant that slave populations experienced negative growth.<sup>5</sup> They began to adopt a wide range of reproduction policies, which promoted motherhood, nuclear families and the care of children. These also served to deny abolitionist charges that planters failed to elevate slave women. To rationalise the shift in the labour supply policy from 'buying' to 'breeding', slaveholders changed their representations of slave women. Before 1770, they conceived slave women essentially as non-feminine, that is devoid of all the attributes with which they clothed white women, such as tenderness and graciousness. Thereafter they made them members of the 'gentler sex' and presented them as natural nurturers.

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<sup>4</sup>Wilberforce in a letter to the king of Haiti, 8 October 1818 in R. I. Wilberforce and S. Wilberforce, eds., *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, 2 vols. (London, 1850), 1:377.

<sup>5</sup> The average age of female imports was 23. This and the period of 'seasoning', that is the period of adjustment to the plantation regime which lasted from one to three years, explains to a large extent the differences in fertility rates between African-born and locally-born slave women. Richard Dunn's study of the sugar estate Mesopotamia concludes that African-born slave women gave birth to 2.7 children on average, as against 3.7 for locally-born slave women. R. S. Dunn, 'Sugar Production and

### *Concepts and Questions*

In recent years, the notion 'representation' has emerged in a large number of historical studies.<sup>6</sup> In some studies it has a political meaning, denoting the representation, through institutional bodies or pressure groups, of the interests of political subjects.<sup>7</sup> The most common meaning is that of the linguistic representation of past events and lives.<sup>8</sup> There are also two more nuanced meanings: evaluations and appreciations of social practices, such as prostitution and smoking, and images of social groups, such as witches and Jews.<sup>9</sup> This study uses the concept 'representation' in the latter sense. It draws freely upon many of the insights contained in the work of Sander Gilman. Gilman examines debates in which Jews, blacks and other marginalised groups have been represented as different. His aim is not to show the reality behind the representations of these groups, that is disentangling the facts from fiction, but *how* and *why* they were created. He examines the forces that gave rise to and/or changed the images, such as economic and social conditions and political ideologies, and provides insights into the process of creating images of difference. As to the latter, he demonstrates that those who did the representing mobilised a wide range of

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Slave Women in Jamaica', in I. Berlin and P. D. Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville/London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 66.

<sup>6</sup> Since the late 1980s, theories of history have analysed the use of the term 'representation' in historical studies. See, for instance, H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), chap. 1; and R. Chartier, *Cultural History* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), chap. 1.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, J. Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> This notion of representation is invoked in the debate about whether historians can accurately represent the past. There are three positions within this debate. The first argues that the past as it actually happened can be represented through a detailed study of the sources. The second is of the opinion that the past can be approximated through the use of general (social) laws. The third states that the past cannot be accurately represented because historians use language to understand the past. For more on this debate see A. Munslow, *Deconstruction History* (London: Routledge, 1997), 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> An example of the first is T. Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (London: Longman, 1999), and of the second,

contemporary discourses and adopted particular rhetorical strategies, such as concentrating upon physical differences and locating the differences in nature. Gilman's main concern, however, is with the ideological implications of the images. He examines how the images affected the status of those represented as different and how they responded to the construction of their identity. He argues that the images, which were both negative and positive, were powerful because: they were based on a combination of real-life experience and myth; informed or justified social practices which allocated to the objects of representation an inferior status in society; and were also internalised by them.<sup>10</sup>

This thesis follows Gilman's approach in that it concentrates on the question *how* and *why* colonialists and abolitionists created positive and negative images of slave women in a variety of written texts and spoken statements. It firmly locates the images within the contextual layers in which they were embedded. It pays, for instance, attention to their interaction with the slave law, the plantation practices, and various institutions, such as the local legislature and the Colonial Office. It furthermore examines when and why the images emerged, indicates whether they changed over time, and points out that they served to explain, rationalise, criticise, conceal, legitimise and transform the conditions of slave women. Much emphasis will be placed on how the images were constructed. It will be shown that abolitionists and colonialists used various rhetorical strategies to gain the support of their audience

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D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Gilman's main works on images of difference are *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (London: Cornell University Press, 1985) and *The Jew's Body* (London/New York: Routledge, 1991). Gilman's work is part of a larger body of studies on 'Othering', that is the process by which social groups who fall short of the canonised set of cultural values are defined and treated as different. For an introduction to this literature, see S. Hall and P. Du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), chap. 1.

and justify proposals to change the condition of slave women that represented slave women primarily as different.

The thesis deviates in two ways from Gilman's approach. First, it does not limit itself to dominant images of difference. Whereas Gilman's work is mainly concerned with crude stereotypes, mostly of the negative kind, this thesis tries to make the reader aware of the complexity of representation. It examines less prominent images of difference in addition to the more categorical and stereotypical images of slave women and also addresses images that emphasised slave women's similarity with English women. Secondly, it does not preoccupy itself with the question how the objects of representation responded to the construction of their identity. An answer to this question requires, among others, a detailed examination of the responses of slave women to the plantation practices that were informed or justified by the representations, such as the establishment of lying-in hospitals in the late eighteenth century. This is not an easy task because contemporary testimony pays little attention to slave women's responses and there are only a few sources in which Jamaican slave women voice their opinion.<sup>11</sup> Studies on Caribbean slave women that have been published in the last three decades and which will be discussed in more detail in the next section, have made some inroads in this area of study. The time allocated for this thesis, however, was not enough to add to these studies and hence provide even a tentative answer to the question.

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<sup>11</sup> The closest we can get to the slave woman's voice are slave songs, testimonies of four slave women before the Council of Protection carried out between 1829 and 1831, statements of former female inmates of workhouses made in the period 1834-1838, and interviews with female apprentices conducted by British and American abolitionists. My article 'Stemmen in de Stilte: Getuigenissen van Jamaicaanse Slavinnen 1834-1838', *Historica* 23, 2 (2000), 9-11 has proved the usefulness of the statements of former female inmates for such a task. It has indicated that the women's self-representation relied partly upon the contemporaries' representations of themselves.



The study also raises questions other than the production of images of slave women. First, it poses the question what colonialists and abolitionists regarded as the proper place and rights of slave women in society and what interventions they considered necessary to realise this ideal. In each of the debates, both sides articulated far-reaching proposals to change slave women's lives. For example, in the debate about motherhood some colonialists suggested that planters should establish nurseries, while many abolitionists asked the government to issue an act to exempt nursing mothers from hard work in the field. This study not only examines the images of slave women that supported such proposals but also explains the rationale behind them and assesses the extent to which they were carried out. It is especially concerned to demonstrate and explain the contradictions between colonialist rhetoric and plantation practice, that is the planters' failure to implement proposals that were widely articulated by the colonialists, such as the suggestion to set up weaning houses in order to combat slave women's practice of late-weaning. Contradictions such as these will be demonstrated by contrasting colonialist writings with other contemporary testimony and recent scholarship, especially demographic studies of Jamaican slavery. To explain them, the thesis will invoke the social, economic, political and cultural context in which the colonialist writings were produced as well as historical studies of slave societies other than Jamaica. Especially studies of slavery in the Antebellum South provide clues as to why Jamaican planters refrained from implementing proposals to interfere in slave women's lives.

Secondly, it asks what issues other than the treatment of slave women were addressed in the three debates. We shall see, for instance, that in the debate about slave women's domestic lives colonialists expressed a concern about the growth of the freed population, while abolitionists articulated the idea that slavery corrupted the

moral behaviour of all involved. In fact, it will be shown that the slave woman played predominantly a supporting role in the debates and that she was essentially a site where crucial political and cultural contests were enacted.

As mentioned, the three debates were central to the competing discourses of slavery and abolition.<sup>12</sup> An examination of the images that lay at the heart of these debates will thus provide a deeper insight into these discourses. It will show that the discourses assigned difference to slave women by invoking the categories of race, gender, sexuality and class; were varied, changing, and inconsistent; and were linked to a number of metropolitan discourses.

The following chapters will illustrate that the categories of difference invoked by the colonialists and abolitionists interacted in various and complicated ways. We shall see, for example, that colonialists represented slave women in the debate about slave motherhood as different from middle-class women but similar to lower-class women, while simultaneously presenting images of slave women as different from all white women. By indicating such complex intersections, this thesis will contribute to a growing range of historical studies that problematize the relationship between categories of difference.<sup>13</sup>

Within each discourse, different groups jostled for power. It will be shown that the discourse of slavery was characterised by struggles between residents and non-residents. The latter invoked more than the former metropolitan discourses in their

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<sup>12</sup> This study understands the concept 'discourse' as a set of rule-governed and internally structured groupings of utterances, sentences and statements that act together to structure reality and inform notions of identity. Discourses invoke the practice of providing categorical and stereotypical images of the Other. This, however, is not the only practice that they invoke to advance the interests and projects of certain groups. Other practices are, for instance, the exclusion of certain statements from the discourse and the reference to particular theories or themes. See S. Mill, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1997), chap. 3.

<sup>13</sup> For a good overview of this field of study, see E. Boris and A. Janssens, 'Complicating Categories: An Introduction', *International Review of Social History* 44 (1999), 1-12.

discussion of slave women. Their assumption about the best way to ensure the profitability and continuation of the slave system led them, furthermore, to propose very different interventions in slave women's lives. Abolitionist discourse was more homogenous. Different opinions about slave women were only presented in the discussion about slave women's sexuality and marriage.

The discourses changed considerably over time. Until the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, there were many similarities between the two. For instance, each articulated a notion of white superiority and prioritised economic over moral arguments. By the mid-1820s, however, they greatly diverged. Abolitionist discourse relied heavily on narratives of female suffering and incorporated a strong attack on the mores of white Jamaican society, while colonialist discourse drew more extensively on metropolitan discourses and provided more than before comparisons of slave women with their lower-class English counterparts. A second change occurred during the so-called period of Apprenticeship, which lasted from 1834 till 1838 and served to prepare the slaves and the planters for a free labour society. Abolitionist discourse adopted narrative strategies to denote the change that had taken place in the status of slave women, such as giving the women a name, while the discourse of slavery relied more heavily than before upon the 'blame-the-victim' rhetoric.

The discourses of slavery and abolition were inconsistent - images that presented slave women as different coexisted with those that constructed them as similar to white women - and even paradoxical. Abolitionist discourse was based on the belief that slave women were full and equal members of the human race. Some of the narrative strategies that they adopted to demand their recognition as equal human beings, such as denying the women a voice, undermined that belief, however. The discourse of slavery was paradoxical in that it tried to defend an institution that

dehumanised slave women by acknowledging their humanity. This was not only done by measuring slave women against the metropolitan ideal of womanhood but also through offering them the institutions of marriage and motherhood.

Throughout the period 1780-1838, debates about slave women invoked the contemporary metropolitan discourses on gender and motherhood, sexuality and marriage, and punishment. During the period of Apprenticeship they also increasingly interacted with the metropolitan discourses on citizenship and freedom. This study will not unravel all the links between these discourses and the abolitionist and colonialist representations of slave women. It will only demonstrate how the discourses were invoked in the representations, leaving aside questions, such as which published materials in the metropolitan society they depended upon or what effects they had on the metropolitan discourses.

### *Historiography*

Until the 1970s studies on Caribbean slavery only marginally addressed the experiences of slave women. Slave women became more visible in the late 1970s with the publication of several works on the demographic and medical history of Caribbean slavery and two studies by Lucille Mathurin Mair in which she described slave women's lives with a reference to their African past.<sup>14</sup> In the early 1980s several articles were published which laid the groundwork for more ambitious studies on Caribbean slave women. Barbara Bush provided an insight into slave women's

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<sup>14</sup> L. M. Mair, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery* (Kingston, Jamaica: IOJ, 1975); and idem, 'The Arrival of Black Women', *Jamaica Journal* 9, 2/3, (1975), 2-7. The most important demographic and medical studies are B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); idem, *Slave Populations in the Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); R. B. Sheridan,

resistance, Lucille Mathurin Mair illuminated the productive lives of slave women, and Rhoda Reddock and Marrietta Morrissey addressed their reproductive lives.<sup>15</sup> In the late 1980s, three monographs on enslaved Caribbean women appeared: H. McD. Beckles, *A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (1989); B. Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838* (1990); and M. Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (1989). All of these studies have done much to enrich our understanding of slave life in the Caribbean and have illuminated the historical experiences of slave women. They, however, have paid little or no attention to textual representations of Caribbean slave women. This reflected to some extent the cautious appreciation of Caribbean historians of poststructuralist theorists, who are read as negating the primacy of human agency in anti-establishment struggles by attributing too much power to language.<sup>16</sup>

Only recently have attempts been made to provide a discussion of the representations of slave women in contemporary testimony. Several articles have been published that examine three negative stereotypes of slave women - the troublemaker, the workhorse and the scheming Jezebel.<sup>17</sup> They examine how and why these images

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*Doctors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and K. Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> B. Bush, 'Defiance or Submission? The Role of the Slave Woman in Slave Resistance in the British Caribbean', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 1(1982), 16-38; idem, 'Toward Emancipation: Slave Women and Resistance to Coercive Labour Regimes in the British West Indian Colonies, 1790-1838', in D. Richardson, ed., *Abolition and its Aftermath: The Historical Context 1790-1916* (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 27-54; L. M. Mair, *Women Field Workers in Jamaica during Slavery* (Mona, Jamaica: Department of History UWI, 1987) as reprinted in R. Terborg-Penn and A. Benton Rushing, eds., *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*, (Washington: Howard University Press, 1996), 167-79, further references are to the reprinted edition; R. E. Reddock, 'Women and Slavery in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective', *Latin American Perspectives* 12, 1 (1985), 63-80; and M. Morrissey, 'Women's Work, Family Formation and Reproduction among Caribbean Slaves', *Review* 9, 3 (1986), 339-67.

<sup>16</sup> For more information about the various approaches to the history of Caribbean slave women, see H. McD. Beckles, 'Sex and Gender in the Historiography of Caribbean Slavery', in V. Shepherd, B. Brereton and B. Bailey, eds., *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 125-40.

<sup>17</sup> The most important are: H. McD. Beckles, 'Female Enslavement and Gender Ideologies in the Caribbean', in P. E. Lovejoy, ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2000), 163-82; V. A. Shepherd, 'Gender and Representation in European Accounts of Pre-Emancipation Jamaica', in V. A. Shepherd and H. McD. Beckles, eds., *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student*

were created and also how they changed over time. The main aim of these articles, however, is not the *construction* but the *deconstruction* of these images, that is the authors try to overturn the negative images by providing accounts of slave women's daily lives. This deconstruction is a strategic practice. The authors are of the opinion that links exist between these historic images and contemporary images of black Caribbean women which serve to block their advancement. They focus on slave women's resistance to plantation authority to provide a positive alternative to the dominant negative representations.

This study of representations of slave women deviates from and adds to these approaches. It is first of all based on a much wider range of contemporary testimony. Most of the articles have based their findings on well-known colonialist writings, such as Edward Long's multi-volumed history of Jamaica. This study incorporates not only the well-known tracts in defence of the slavery trade and slavery, but also various relatively unknown colonialist pamphlets, colonialist fiction, statements of colonialists before parliamentary committees, and reports by colonialist administrators. The abolitionist materials on which this study is based, range from pamphlets and fiction to statements before parliamentary committees and travel accounts. Although historians have used this material to investigate the lives of slave women, it has been much less used to explore discourses about them.<sup>18</sup> Even less has it been used to explore the mutual engagement between abolitionist and colonialist

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*Reader* (London: James Currey, Ian Randle and Marcus Wiener, 2000), 702-11; B. Bush, 'History, Memory, Myth'? Reconstructing the History (or Histories) of Black Women in the African Diaspora', in S. Newell, ed., *Images of African and Caribbean Women: Migration, Displacement, Diaspora* (Stirling: Centre of Commonwealth Studies, 1996), 3-28; and idem, "'Sable Venus", "She Devil" or "Drudge"? British Slavery and the "Fabulous Fiction" of Black Women's Identities, c. 1650-1838', *Women's History Review* 9, 4 (2000), 761-89.

<sup>18</sup> Only a few studies on slave women have incorporated abolitionist writings. Hilary Beckles, for example, has used several texts written by female abolitionists in his article 'Female Enslavement' and Richard Sheridan has used statements by anti-slavery witnesses before the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery to describe the impact of pronatalist practices on Caribbean slave women in his book *Doctors and Slaves*.

discourses about such women. It is in exploring the abolitionist and colonialist discourses and their engagement, that this study makes a unique contribution to the study of slave women.

This study also expands on existing work on representations of slave women by focussing on the period 1780-1838. Many existing studies on representations of slave women have concentrated upon the eighteenth century, while those that relate to the nineteenth century have tended to omit the period of Apprenticeship.<sup>19</sup> The latter has been subject of study, sometimes in its own right and sometimes included within studies of Caribbean society between 1834-1865.<sup>20</sup> Most of these studies have focussed on how successful the Apprenticeship was in providing the conditions for a free plantation economy in the Caribbean. Only recently have historians examined how the ex-slaves experienced the Apprenticeship System,<sup>21</sup> and how it affected the lives of African-Caribbean women. Mimi Sheller, for example, has assessed the ways in which black Jamaican women tried to improve their situation in the period 1834-1865, while Sheena Boa has examined the experiences of female apprentices in St.

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<sup>19</sup> The three monographs on Caribbean slave women that were published in the late 1980s and early 1990s claim to survey the whole period of plantation slavery. They, however, concentrate on the period 1780-1834. According to Bridget Brereton, this focus stems from the availability of primary sources. See B. Brereton, 'Searching for the Invisible Woman', *Slavery and Abolition* 13, 2 (1992), 87. It seems, however, that the focus also largely results from the authors' opinion that the Apprenticeship was a clear deviation from the period of slavery, as the legal status of slave women drastically changed.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, W. L. Mathieson, *British Slavery and Its Abolition 1823-1838* (London: Longman, Green and co. 1926); W.L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937; reprint New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970); and W. A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>21</sup> One of the first to address this question was S. Wilmot in his article 'Not "Full Free": The Ex-Slaves and the Apprenticeship System in Jamaica 1834-1838', *Jamaica Journal* 17, (1984), 2-10. Two of the most recent studies in this field are F. Cooper, T. C. Holt and R. J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and M. Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery* (Miami: University Press of Florida, 2001). Both examine Apprenticeship as part of the longer post-emancipation period. They challenge the assumption common among historians of slavery that emancipation brought an end to slavery and that the former slaves achieved full freedom, by pointing out the enormous struggle of the ex-slaves and their descendants in the nineteenth century to achieve what they considered to be 'proper freedom'. Sheller compares the struggles for freedom that took place in Haiti and Jamaica. Cooper, Holt and Scott examine not only the process of emancipation in Jamaica and Cuba but also in Southern Louisiana and French West Africa.

Vincent.<sup>22</sup> This thesis will further our understanding of the Apprenticeship System in general and the experiences of female apprentices in particular, as it examines the representations of slave women within their social, economic and culture setting. It shows, for instance, that drastic changes took place after 1834 in childbirth and nursing practices, the living arrangements of slave couples and the methods adopted by planters to extract as much labour as possible from the women. These support the abolitionists' contention that the Apprenticeship System was slavery by another name and emphasise the need to incorporate this period in the more general studies on Caribbean slave women. The following chapters will also provide some tentative conclusions as to the ways in which planters tried to safeguard their economic and social status during this period of transition. This issue has thus far not been fully developed in studies on the post-emancipation period. It has been shown that the workhouse was an important means for the planters to keep the existing power relations intact.<sup>23</sup> This thesis confirms this conclusion, while adding that planters made as much use, if not more, of estate practices to achieve this purpose.

Finally, this study deviates from earlier work on representations of slave women in that its principal argument does not rest on the assumption that the contemporaries' representations were misrepresentations but on the idea that they had real consequences for slave women. It is not concerned with determining the line between 'real' and 'fabled' aspects of slave women, but with explaining how slave women were defined and how these definitions affected the way that they were treated. We shall see, for instance, that colonialist representations of slave women

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<sup>22</sup> M. Sheller, 'Quasheba, Mother, Queen: Black Women's Public Leadership and Political Protest in Post-emancipation Jamaica, 1834-65', *Slavery and Abolition* 19, 3 (1998), 90-117; and S. Boa, 'Experiences of Women Estate Workers during the Apprenticeship period in St. Vincent, 1834-1838: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom', *Women's History Review* 10, 3 (2001), 381-407



informed slave laws that not only aimed to increase the labour force but also to keep slave women under control and sustain productivity. Abolitionist representations also exerted an influence over slave women's lives. They supported, for example, analytical critiques that forced some planters, especially those who did not reside in the Caribbean, to change the way they treated their slave women. The abolitionist denunciation of female flogging, for instance, led some planters to replace the practice by solitary confinement. It will become clear, however, that not all abolitionist representations had an enabling effect on slave women and that some colonialist representations exerted a rather positive influence on slave women.

This study then adds significantly to the historiography of Caribbean slave women. First, because it analyses representations rather than the lived experiences of slave women. And secondly, because it includes abolitionist representations and addresses the period of Apprenticeship. It also makes an important contribution to the historiography of Caribbean slavery more generally. Thus far, studies on Caribbean slavery have examined the methods adopted by the planters to control their labour force, which ranged from physical coercion to rewards, and the ways in which slaves responded to them.<sup>24</sup> Many of these are based on the assumption that planters held absolute control over their slaves through the use or threat of direct physical coercion and that their power was unified and coherent. This analysis of representations of slave women in the discourses of slavery and abolition may be seen as a response to Barry Higman's recent challenge to provide alternative histories of Caribbean slavery:

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<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, P. D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: the Role of ideas in A Tropical Colony 1830-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), chap. 5; and T. C Holt, 'The Essence of Contract', in F. Cooper, T. C. Holt and R. J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery*, 33-59.

<sup>24</sup> In the last two decades the emphasis has been on slave responses. The consensus is that slaves were not victims of the plantation regime but rebellious creators of resilient and independent communities.

I strongly believe that a progressive and creative history-writing should always be looking for new ways of exploring the past . . . I merely argue for a greater openness to innovation whatever its ultimate source may be. This is essential to a more critical attitude to 'evidence' and to the extraction of meaning from a wider definition of data that builds on a sceptical approach to texts by applying sharper tools to their dissection and analysis.<sup>25</sup>

The thesis relies to a large extent upon the same primary sources as those used by scholars who have examined the experiences of (female) Caribbean slaves. It takes a fresh look at the stories told about slave women in these works, by exploring their authorship, ideologies, audience, styles, and institutional, social and historical context. This approach of reading the primary sources as texts, representing, and not merely transmitting, information about slave women will make the reader aware that power in a slave society was also discursively constituted. The representations that assigned a difference to slave women had power because they informed or justified the means of slave control examined by earlier historians, as well as many other practices, such as sexual harassment, that rendered slave women vulnerable and which hitherto have received little attention. The approach adopted to the primary materials also enables the thesis to show that power in a slave society was far from coherent. It will become clear in following chapters that there were intractable contradictions in the system of slavery. This study shows, in other words, that a fuller picture of the workings of the system of slavery can be obtained if historians combine an analysis of the slaves' real experiences with a theorising of their representations.<sup>26</sup>

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See, for instance, M. Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean 1736-1831* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> B. W. Higman, *Writing West Indian Histories* (London: Macmillan Education, 1999), 247-48.

<sup>26</sup> This study will also be of use for historians working on slavery in other parts of the New World. For instance, studies on American slavery (which are in various respects more advanced than those on Caribbean slavery) are also more concerned with representing the experiences of the slaves than the ways in which and to what effect contemporaries represented slaves to their audiences. See, for

### *Context*

The geographical focus of this study is Jamaica. The island featured extensively in abolitionist and colonialist writings and provided the basis for British policy relating to slavery and emancipation. This was not only because the island had the largest slave population of the British Caribbean - in 1807 44.9 per cent of all slaves lived in Jamaica, rising to 46.8 per cent in 1834 - but also because it was demographically and politically the most complex slave society.<sup>27</sup> It had a larger slave and a smaller white population than other colonies. In 1810, slaves formed 85.7 per cent of the total population in the island and whites 6.9 per cent, compared to 80.6 per cent and 16.7 per cent in Barbados.<sup>28</sup> The age structure, colour and sex ratios of the slave population as well as the percentage of African-born slaves and the number of freed people of colour differed also substantially from that of other colonies. As with most slave colonies in the British Caribbean, Jamaica had a representative Assembly; a governor, who was the organ through which the imperial government transmitted its orders to Jamaica by way of the cabinet and the Colonial Office; and a Council that acted as the upper house of the legislature. The House of Assembly, consisting of attorneys, overseers, small proprietors, and a few merchants and professional men, resisted the wishes of the Crown far more than other Caribbean legislatures. For instance, it stubbornly refused to endorse one of the most important proposals launched by the government in 1823 to ameliorate the condition of the slaves. This was the ban on female flogging.<sup>29</sup> By the late 1820s most colonial legislatures had enacted a ban.

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instance, S. White, 'Representing Slavery: A Roundtable Discussion', *Common Place* 1, 4 (2001), <http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/slavery/index.shtml>.

<sup>27</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> For more information on these political institutions during slavery see Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 72-74. The thesis confirms Curtin's conclusion that the Assembly often emerged as the victor in these

Abolitionists concentrated from then onwards even more on Jamaica to expose the nature of the system of slavery. This and the government's attempts to encroach upon the authority of the Assembly triggered an increase in writings by Jamaican planters and their supporters, who defended the slave system primarily by comparing the material well-being of the slaves with the poverty and misery of the English working class.<sup>30</sup> A second reason for the focus on Jamaican slave women is that most studies on Caribbean slavery have concentrated upon Jamaica. Hence there is a rich literature that can be used to locate the representations of slave women within their social, political, economic and cultural context.<sup>31</sup>

This study stands out from existing work on slave women because it concentrates upon a later period that includes the Apprenticeship System. The period 1780-1838 was a much more turbulent period than the eighteenth century, giving rise not only to many representations of slave women but also to very varied and even contradictory representations that went beyond crude, negative stereotypes. By focusing on this period then, this study will enable the reader to gain some understanding of the complexity of representation, that is the production and consumption of images of Others. Between 1780 and 1838 the hegemony of Jamaican planters was severely challenged, not only by demographic and economic changes, but also by the abolitionists and the government at home and slave insurrections. A brief summary of

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struggles, as the Colonial Office was reluctant to force it to adopt government directives. It also supports his thesis that the relationship between the Assembly and the Crown changed over time. It will show, for example, that in the late 1820s and early 1830s the Assembly occasionally gave in to the government's wishes in order to retain its constitutional privileges.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 62-69.

<sup>31</sup> This study relies especially upon the following studies on Jamaica slavery and emancipation: Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*; O. Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967); S. J. Hurwitz and E. F. Hurwitz, *Jamaica: A Historical Portrait* (London: Pall Mall, 1971); E. Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*; and Burn, *Emancipation*.

these challenges and an outline of the legal status of Jamaican slave women is essential in order to understand the following analysis of representations of Jamaican slave women and the interventions in the women's lives that they gave rise to or justified.

Until the 1780s, the legal status of Jamaican slave women was almost identical to male slaves. The Slave Law defined both as the personal property of their owners. They could, for instance, be sold to settle a debt. The law contained not only coercive clauses, such as those stipulating the number of lashes a slave could be given for minor offences, but also protective clauses. The latter mentioned, for instance, that a planter should provide his slaves with a plot of land to grow food as well as clothing, lodging and medical care. The Slave Law passed in December 1788 was the first to contain protective clauses that were directed specifically at slave women. It stipulated that overseers should be given a monetary reward for every slave birth, thereby encouraging the protection of pregnant women.<sup>32</sup> Successive Slave Laws extended the range of protective measures.

The period under discussion witnessed a gradual increase in the proportion of female slaves. In 1807 there were 174,500 slave men to 168,000 slave women in the island.<sup>33</sup> The numerical superiority of male slaves was the result of the sexual disparity of the slave trade: slave cargoes had sex ratios varying between 150 and 180 males per 100 females.<sup>34</sup> As a result of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the sexual imbalance worked itself gradually out. By 1832, there were 152,000 slave men

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<sup>32</sup> 'An Act . . . for consolidating and bringing into one the several laws relating to slaves and giving them further protecting and security for altering the mode of tryal of slaves charged with capital offences and for other purposes' in S. Lambert, ed., *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century* (hereafter *Slave Trade Committee Report*) 147 vols. (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1975), 70:213. Hereafter cited as *1788 Slave Law*.

<sup>33</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 116.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. The sexual disparity was caused by both demand and supply factors. Planters demanded larger number of male slaves as they considered them stronger workers, while female slaves were in short supply because of the high demand within African society for female slaves.

to 161,000 slave women. The abolition of the slave trade also led to a decline in the number of African-born slave women, from 37 per cent of the total female labour force in 1817 to 23.5 per cent in 1832.<sup>35</sup>

About 50 per cent of the Jamaican slave women worked on sugar estates, 14 per cent on coffee plantations, 13 per cent on livestock pens, and 7 per cent on minor staple plantations, while 6 per cent belonged to mobile jobbing gangs. Another 8 percent lived in towns.<sup>36</sup> Abolitionists and colonialists concentrated in their accounts upon the women that lived and worked on sugar estates.<sup>37</sup> Some 15 per cent of them were 'domestics', that is they were employed in the house in tasks such as cleaning, sewing, cooking and laundry; 5 per cent worked as field nurses, midwives and doctresses; and about 6 per cent of the women looked after the estate's vegetable garden or livestock.<sup>38</sup> The remaining 24 per cent were employed in the field. As slave men were put to a fairly wide range of occupations, slave women outnumbered men in the field. On Worthy Park, for instance, they made up 54 per cent of the total field labour force in the 1790s, rising to 65 per cent in the early 1830s as a result of the abolition of the slave trade when the male segment of the slave population declined.<sup>39</sup> Able-bodied women were put in the first gang and were employed in hard manual labour, such as digging cane holes and loading carts. Out of crop time, they worked a twelve-hour day with breaks for lunch and sometimes breakfast, six days a week. During crop time, they were usually employed from sunrise to sunset and worked also three nights a week. Sundays were generally free and spent on the provision grounds,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 116 and 126.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>37</sup> It has been estimated that roughly 18 percent of the slave women were inactive. See V. A. Shepherd, ed., *Women in Caribbean History* (London: James Currey, 1999), 52.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 52 and 55-57.

<sup>39</sup> Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves*, 241.

that is the half acre of uncultivated land given by the planter on which slaves grew most of their staple food.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the period 1780-1838 Jamaica's prosperity depended on sugar. In 1780 about 89 per cent of its total export consisted of sugar and sugar-derived products, such as rum and molasses. The cash crop commanded the island's major resources of land, capital and labour. The ownership of the roughly 600 sugar estates was concentrated in the hands of a small proportion of the white population. About one-sixth of the planters were absentees. They left the management of their estates in the hands of attorneys who were paid a salary, or more commonly a commission based on the annual yield. These men, who were predominantly lawyers, clergymen and merchants, visited the estate only once or twice a year. The daily management was in the hands of an overseer who supervised several white officers and carried responsibility for the slaves' allowances of food, clothing and medicine.<sup>41</sup>

Sugar planters suffered tremendously from the American War of Independence, which not only cut off an important export market for molasses and rum but also the main source of most of the capital goods needed on the plantations. As a result, sugar profit rates fell from 8.9 to 3 per cent between 1763 and 1782. Profits recovered well in the 1790s, however, increasing to 13.9 per cent. This rise was partly due to the slave rebellion in St. Domingue in 1791, which eliminated sugar exports from this French colony. The profits were maintained through the vicissitudes of the French wars; production costs rose, but sugar prices rose also. Depression came only in the 1820s. The price of sugar halved between 1815-1819 and 1830-1834 as a result of the end of wartime scarcities and an increase in competition. The newer

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<sup>40</sup> Mair, *Women Field Workers*, 171; Shepherd, *Women in Caribbean History*, 54-55; and Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 223.

British colonies in the region - Trinidad, St. Lucia, Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice - produced at a cheaper rate and flooded the already saturated British market with sugar. In continental European markets, Brazilian, French Caribbean and Cuban cane sugar, as well as European beet sugar, weakened demand for Jamaican sugar. A final source of competition was the East India Company, which opened up new land for sugar cultivation and used cheap labour. The fall in the price of sugar and an increase in sugar duties squeezed profit margins in sugar production. It has been estimated that rates of profit on sugar plantations in the British colonies fell from 9.6 per cent in 1815 to 5.3 per cent in 1834.<sup>42</sup>

These economic pressures were accompanied by changes in the age structure and size of the slave population. After the abolition of the slave trade, the most productive slaves - those aged 20-40 years - became relatively less numerous, while older and less productive slaves became relatively more numerous. In addition, the slave population as a whole declined by some 10.8 per cent between 1807 and 1834. Some planters responded to the economic and demographic changes by abandoning their estates. The white population fell from 18,700 to 15,000 between 1820 and 1834. Many planters, however, tried to find alternative activities in order to maintain their gross receipts. They combined, for instance, sugar growing with pimento or coffee. In addition, they tried to maintain their output levels by shifting the slave

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<sup>41</sup> L. J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1765-1833: A Study in Social and Economic History* (New York: Century, 1928), 52; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 34-35; and Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 23 and 56-57.

<sup>42</sup> J. R. Ward, 'The Profitability of Sugar Planting in the British West Indies, 1650-1834', *Economic History Review* 31, 2 (1978), 197-213 as reprinted in H. McD. Beckles and V. A. Shepherd, eds., *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: a Student Reader* (London: Ian Randle, 1991), 81-89. Further references are to the reprint edition.; Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 27 and 437; and Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*, 44 and 199. Ragatz's book triggered an extensive debate about the economic decline of Jamaica and other Caribbean slave colonies, which is still going on. See, for instance, D. B. Ryden, 'Does Decline Make Sense? The West Indian Economy and the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, 3 (2001), 347-74. A good overview of the debate is S. Carrington, 'The State of the Debate on the Role of Capitalism in the Ending of the Slave System' in Beckles and Shepherd, eds., *Caribbean Slave Society*, 435-45.



labour force to tasks where returns could be maximized. Many domestics, for example, were relegated to the field and elderly field slaves were no longer promoted to lighter tasks. The most important way, however, in which planters tried to maintain their profits was by putting relentless pressure on all their workers. These measures not only led to a considerable rise in the production of sugar but also to an increase in the rate of natural decrease in the island, from -0.25 per cent in 1818 to -1 per cent in 1830.<sup>43</sup>

The period witnessed three slave insurrections in the British Caribbean: Barbados in 1816, Demerara in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831-32. They all aimed to overturn the slave society and were largely responses to changing conditions on the estates, created by the 1791 St. Domingue revolution, regulations imposed by the Colonial Office, and the economic difficulties faced by the planters. They were not successful in the sense that the 1791 St. Domingue revolution was successful. Many rebellious slaves were killed in fighting or were executed and transported after trial. The Jamaican rebellion, which began on Christmas Day 1831 and lasted for two weeks, had a greater geographical spread than the rebellions in Barbados and Demerara, affected larger number of slaves, and had a much wider impact. The rebellion began in isolated plantation areas and spread to cover a large part of the western end of the island, where the heavy rate of natural decrease was placing stress on the slave system. Between 20,000 and 30,000 slaves took part in the rebellion and destroyed property valued at £1,132,440. Some 200 slaves were killed fighting, while 312 were executed and 35 transported. As planters were convinced that Baptist and

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<sup>43</sup> Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, 13 and 213-24; Ward, 'Profitability', 87; and Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 428.

Methodist missionaries had prodded the slaves in rebellion, they burnt down several chapels, jailed a number of missionaries and even expelled some from the island.<sup>44</sup>

The Jamaican rebellion played a crucial role in hastening emancipation. In April 1832, the British public learnt of the persecution of the missionaries. Eyewitness reports of those missionaries who had been expelled played a prominent role at the annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society which was held in May. The meeting demanded that its parliamentary leaders should give an immediate reply. Thomas Fowell Buxton, the parliamentary leader, responded to these pressures and introduced a resolution committing the government to immediate slave emancipation, which was voted out on the grounds that there was no time to consider it (it was launched before the Reform Bill was settled). As a compromise, the government agreed to set up a parliamentary committee to inquire into the actual state of slavery and report on the best way to free the slaves, which was strongly supported by the West India Committee. A committee of the Lords composed of 25 peers, 10 of who were slaveholders or near relations of slaveholders, examined evidence relating only to Jamaica. Its report was finished in August but had little impact. The King's speech to the reformed parliament did not include the emancipation of the slaves. The failure of the new administration to come forward with an emancipation proposal provoked the most far-reaching abolitionist campaign ever. This and other factors led Parliament to pass the Abolition of Slavery Act in August 1833. It set aside a special fund of £20 million as compensation to West Indian planters and stipulated that from August 1834 onwards all children under six would be free, while the other slaves would be

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<sup>44</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 393-94; Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 432-33; and Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 273.

apprenticed to their former masters for a period of either four or six years, depending on whether they were domestics or field slaves.<sup>45</sup>

The Apprenticeship System had to ensure a peaceful transition from slavery to freedom and keep the estates operative. Its main aim was to create the conditions for a free plantation economy. The ex-slaves became free labourers for one-fourth of the week, during which time they could earn wages by selling their labour or work on their provision grounds. The administration of the System was given to a corpus of Special Magistrates (S.M.s), recruited from outside the planting class and paid by Great Britain. They were to stand between the planters and the apprentices and provide a basis for mutual confidence that would last beyond the period of Apprenticeship. At the end of 1837, the Jamaican governor Lionel Smith and the Colonial Office agreed that the apprentices were not sufficiently protected - many planters, for instance, punished their apprentices without going through the legal form of calling on the S.M. - and that the System had to be corrected by imperial action. They had strong backing from public opinion as some damaging accounts of the System had been published and widely read since 1836. Some of these refuted the conclusions mentioned in the report of the select committee on the workings of the Apprenticeship System that was published in August 1836. In April 1838 an Act was passed, designed to remedy the abuses of the System. Rather than accept this British dictation, the Jamaican Assembly abolished the System altogether on 1 August 1838.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 451-58; and Burn, *Emancipation*, 97-98.

### *Sources and Lay-out*

The study is based on primary sources, supplemented by reading on histories of slavery, abolition and emancipation; gender history; histories of sexuality, race and crime; and romantic fiction. It examines a wide range of published texts: travel accounts; diaries of residents; memoirs of (former) residents; slave management manuals; histories of the island; Slave Laws; reports of parliamentary enquiries into the slave trade, slavery and the Apprenticeship System; analytical critiques and defences of slavery; abolitionist and colonialist propaganda pamphlets; novels and verse; official correspondence between the Colonial Office and the governor; and reports from S.M.s. It also incorporates some unpublished material, such as diaries of Moravian missionaries. Some of the primary printed sources do not specifically refer to Jamaica. For instance, the slave management manual *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes* (1788) was based on the writer's experiences as a planter in Barbados in the 1760s and 1770s. Such manuals have been included as they were widely read by Jamaican planters. A number of pamphlets that deal with West Indian slavery in general, such as the *The Death Warrant of Negro Slavery Throughout the British Dominions* (1829), have been used as most of them took Jamaican slavery as their model.

Though the thesis discusses a wide range of primary material, it makes no pretence of total 'coverage'. The time allocated for this study has necessitated a focus on written sources that directly addressed the workings of the slave system. It has thus not only left unexamined visual sources and public speeches by abolitionists and colonialists but also representations of slave women in cultural forms that did not aim

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<sup>46</sup> Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, chap. 5; Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, 132-33; and Hurwitz and

to defend or critique slavery, such as Richard Cumberland's play *The Fashionable Lover, the West Indian, and the Brothers* (1801). The primary sources are varied enough, however, in terms of genre, time, site, and standpoint to demonstrate that the discourses of slavery and abolition were varied, changing, inconsistent, and intertwined with various metropolitan discourses.

The study is divided into thirds, with each part describing a debate about Jamaican slave women. Part 1 'Slave Women as Mothers' examines the motherhood debate that was initiated by the colonialists in the early 1780s. Part 2 'Slave Women as Companions' consists of three chapters that address aspects of slave women's domestic lives. The first looks at the ways in which colonialists and abolitionists represented slave women's sexuality. The following chapters examine their views on slave marriage, which were far less supported by specific images of slave women. The debate about the physical abuse of slave women is examined in part 3 'Slave Women as Subjects of Plantation Discipline'. Unlike the other debates, this one was initiated by the abolitionists and took part primarily in the 1820s and 1830s. Each part will be preceded by an introduction which indicates when and why the debate emerged, sums up its major changes, and also embeds the part within the historiography of Caribbean slave women. The study finishes with a conclusion that summarises the findings and indicates the scope for further research.

**PART I**  
**SLAVE WOMEN AS MOTHERS**

## INTRODUCTION TO PART I

Slave motherhood occupied a central role in colonialist and abolitionist discourse. Colonialists addressed it from the early 1780s onwards in response to demographic changes and abolitionist pressure to end the slave trade. It has been estimated that, without slave imports from Africa, the Jamaican slave population would naturally have declined by some two per cent per annum in the 1770s and 1780s.<sup>1</sup> In such circumstances, it is not surprising that the abolitionist campaign to end the slave trade, which gained momentum from 1787 onwards, was seen to pose a real threat to the survival of the slave plantation sector by the planter class. To counteract the anticipated effects of possible abolition of the slave trade, planters adopted, among other things, a range of pronatalist measures. As the status of slave children was derived solely from their mothers, most of these were exclusively directed at the females in the slave population. Prominent among them was a set of indulgences and allowances for pregnant and nursing women.<sup>2</sup> In order to rationalise these changes in slave motherhood, colonialists provided numerous accounts of slave mothers who were not only less capable than English mothers in ensuring their children's needs but were also less interested in their well-being. Although very few interventions in slave motherhood were adopted after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, slave

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<sup>1</sup> Eighteenth-century abolitionist records placed the depletion rate of the Caribbean slave population, that is the excess of deaths over births, as high as 50 or 60 per cent. Using case study analyses, demographic historians have come up with a much lower depletion rate. Ward estimates, for instance, a depletion rate of 20 in Jamaica in the period 1775-1800. This compares less favourably with other Caribbean islands. Barbados and the Leeward Islands, for instance, had a depletion rate of 12 to 15 per cent in the period 1775-1800. J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery 1750-1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 121-22. For other estimates of natural decrease in Jamaica, see Higman, *Slave Populations*, 308; and M. Craton and J. Walvin, *A Jamaican Plantation: The History of Worthy Park* (London/New York: W. H. Allen, 1970), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of pronatalist measures that were not geared solely towards slave women are: the awards given to owners and overseers of plantations showing a natural increase, incentives to marriage, and the provision of better housing.

motherhood continued to feature in colonialist writings. The issue was then primarily addressed to disclaim the abolitionist contention that planters were mistreating their slaves.

Abolitionists addressed slave motherhood not only because it was an excellent propaganda tool but also because their project of transforming Jamaica into a civilised, Christian, free labour economy with democratic institutions depended upon slave women's ability to exercise their role as mothers. Slave women had to provide sufficient healthy labourers for the future free society and had to ensure that they were instructed in correct moral behaviour. It was especially the latter role of slave mothers as 'moral regenerators' that abolitionists addressed in their writings. Not surprisingly, this role received even more emphasis during the Apprenticeship System. S.M. Ricketts, who tried to interpret the Abolition Act in favour of the apprentices, mentioned, for instance, in his report of July 1837 that: 'Upon their feelings depends the success of the system, as far as the future habits of the rising generation are concerned.'<sup>3</sup>

Part I is divided into two chapters. The first examines the colonialist debate about slave women's childbirth practices. Only a few abolitionists addressed this issue. As a result of the role that they had allocated to slave mothers in their project of a free Jamaica, they concentrated far more upon slave women's nursing practices. Their critique of the nursing arrangements as well as the colonialist remarks about this issue will be examined in the second chapter. The main concern of each chapter is with the mother images that underlay the contemporaries' remarks. They will show that colonialists and abolitionists provided not only multiple and contradictory but also changing representations of slave mothers. Until the mid-1820s, colonialist

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<sup>3</sup> House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers* (hereafter *PP*) 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 313.



depictions of slave mothers emphasised their difference. They were mostly represented as ignorant of proper mothering skills and indifferent towards their offspring. These representations continued to be provided in the late 1820s and the early 1830s, but alongside images of slave mothers that suggested that they were very similar to their white counterparts. During the Apprenticeship period, colonialists replaced these images of indifferent and ignorant mothers and relatively capable and caring mothers with a single image, namely that of the troublemaker. The latter was a mother who refused to comply with changes in plantation practices which, according to the planters, were intended to allow her to take sufficient care of her infants. Like the colonialists, abolitionists portrayed slave women as lacking sufficient affection for their children and also as deficient in care until the mid-1820s. Thereafter, however, they resorted far more than the colonialists to images that emphasised slave women's similarity with white, English mothers. A very prominent mother image in their writings in the late 1820s and early 1830s was that of the naturally affectionate and caring mother. This image continued to be presented during the Apprenticeship period alongside that of the suffering mother, that is a mother who was unable to mother properly because of the various changes in plantation practices since August 1834.

The various mother images in the discourses of slavery and abolition intersected with the twin discourses of womanhood and motherhood in the metropolitan society. Seen before primarily as productive members of a household and as dutiful daughters and wives, from the 1750s onwards women in the metropolitan society were increasingly depicted as mothers with weighty responsibilities for the fate of the family and the stability of society. Gradually there emerged a discourse of motherhood that defined women as natural nurturers, conflated femininity with maternity, and created a particular standard of mothering.

The last stipulated that a mother's main task was to ensure the physical survival of her children. In addition, she had to make sure that the children were emotionally content and received a thorough moral training.<sup>4</sup> All this occurred against a background of a rapidly increasing population. Using a sample of 404 parish registers and a technique called back projection, Wrigley and Schofield estimated that the population in England rose from 5,727,000 to 11,204,711 between 1751 and 1821.<sup>5</sup> They, and various other demographic historians, have attributed this rise to earlier and more universal marriage, and a rise in birth rates. A rise in real wages and increasing availability of employment enabled young people to set up households earlier. The mean age of first marriage dropped from 26 to 23 years between the 1680s and 1820s, and the proportion of women never marrying fell from 15 per cent to no more than 7.5 per cent. These two developments largely account for the bulk of the increase in the birth rate, from 33.6 in 1760 to 40.0 in 1811.<sup>6</sup> This demographic pattern contrasted, of course, sharply with that of Jamaican slave society.

Colonialists and abolitionists used the contemporary metropolitan discourse of motherhood not only as a standard to judge slave women's mothering abilities but also as a source that provided them with suggestions for interventions in slave women's lives that would enable them to become better mothers. The two groups, however, did

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<sup>4</sup> There is a wide range of literature on the changes in the discourse on and the practice of motherhood in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Remarks about the metropolitan discourse on motherhood in this study are based on P. Branca, *Women in Europe Since 1750* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); and L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson Education, 1987); reprint London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 577 and 588.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 230. Especially the female marriage age fell substantially, from 26.2 between 1700-49 to 23.4 between 1800-49. Until Wrigley and Schofield's study, the acceleration in population growth in the eighteenth century was largely attributed to declining mortality rates. Their explanation has met with a lot of criticism. It has been argued that their aggregate picture obscures the markedly different experiences between different classes and occupational groups within regions and hence provides limited clues for detailed causal analysis. Critics have also put forward other explanatory factors, such as population mobility, urbanisation, local customs and community pressures. For a good overview of these criticisms and the historical debate about population increase during the Industrial Revolution, see P. Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), chap. 5.

not invoke the discourse to the same extent. Colonialists made far less use of it. For instance, they did not refer to it during the Apprenticeship period. The following chapters will not only explain this difference between the discourses of slavery and abolition but will also demonstrate that amongst the colonialists there were those who not only resorted less to the metropolitan discourse of motherhood but were also more selective in what they borrowed from it.

The discourses of slavery and abolition, however, not only borrowed from but also reinforced and even added to the metropolitan discourse of motherhood. By depicting slave women first and foremost as mothers with the heavy responsibilities of ensuring the continuation of the plantation economy and reforming the slave society, they reinforced the claim that women had a built-in capacity for nurturing and that this capacity should determine their social roles. And as they compared and contrasted slave women's mothering practices with those of white, middle-class women in the metropolitan society, they added to the discourse the idea that some women were more natural or better mothers than others.<sup>7</sup>

Its concern with mother images makes this part stand out from existing studies on slave motherhood. Slave motherhood has been studied since the 1970s. Demographic historians have been concerned to explain why the indulgences and allowances for pregnant and nursing women failed to bring about natural increase. They have argued, among others, that they coexisted with harsh punishment and work regimes that had a detrimental impact on slave women's childbearing and rearing capacities and that they

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<sup>7</sup> Although this part is not concerned with unravelling the exact ways in which the debate about slave mothers contributed to the metropolitan ideal of motherhood, it will make a useful contribution to a growing range of literature on the social construction of motherhood in nineteenth-century Britain. The latter has until recently ignored the role that the empire has played in this construction. For a good introduction to this body of literature, see E. J. Yeo, 'The Creation of "Motherhood" and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914', *Women's History Review* 8, 2 (1999), 201-17.

were too small to act as inducements to fertility.<sup>8</sup> Women's historians have examined the impact of the changes in childbirth and nursing practices on the women themselves. This has led them to conclude that the voluntary control over reproduction by the women through contraception, abortion and infanticide was also an important reason for low fertility amongst Jamaican slave women.<sup>9</sup>

Although their main concern is with mother representations, the following chapters will provide some useful additions to existing studies because they embed the representations within their social and economic context. Demographic studies have insufficiently assessed the range of options and constraints faced by planters who tried to increase their slave population by altering childbirth and nursing practices. This part will show that economic considerations were only one factor that determined the extent to which planters could intervene in slave motherhood. As to the studies that have examined slave women's experiences as mothers, most of them have overlooked the deterioration in the condition of pregnant and nursing mothers during the Apprenticeship period.<sup>10</sup> This part describes the set of practices adopted by planters that made it extremely difficult for female apprentices to carry out their maternal duties. It suggests that these practices - ranging from the withdrawal of the nurse who looked after the children while mothers were at work to forcing women to pay back time lost in labour - served to enable planters to regain some of the arbitrary and proprietary power they had lost under the Abolition of Slavery Act.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Higman, *Slave Populations*, chap. 9.

<sup>9</sup> The first study that examined slave women's experiences as mothers was Mair, *The Rebel Woman*.

<sup>10</sup> Notable exceptions are: Mair, *Women Field Workers*; Sheller, 'Quasheba, Mother, Queen'; and Boa, 'Experiences of Women Estate Workers'.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BELLY-WOMEN<sup>1</sup>**

The rate of natural decrease and abolitionist campaigning led from the 1780s onwards to proposals to encourage slave women to breed and alter their ways of giving birth. This chapter examines these proposals as well as the descriptions of childbearing practices provided by colonialists to avert abolitionist criticism. It is divided into five sections. The first examines the colonialists' debate surrounding two major inducements to fertility. The following three analyse their remarks about pregnancy, the delivery and the lying-in period. The final section is a conclusion that demonstrates that colonialists used multiple and changing images of slave mothers to rationalise interventions in pregnancy and childbirth. It also points out links between the colonialist debate and wider metropolitan discourses and suggests that the colonialist debate was not unanimous.

#### **Incentives to Breed**

Jamaican slave women faced various inducements to fertility, ranging from a reduction in working hours and extra allowances of food for pregnant and nursing women to cash rewards for prolific women.<sup>2</sup> This section concentrates upon the latter and the practice of exempting mothers with six or more children from field labour, as these incentives were

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<sup>1</sup> This term was commonly used by white and black Jamaicans to refer to pregnant slave women.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the pronatalist policies, see B. Bush, 'Hard Labour: Women, Childbirth and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies', *History Workshop Journal*, 36 (1993), 83-99; and Higman, *Slave Populations*, chap. 9.

the most direct expression of the planters' wish to increase the slave population and affected all slave women as they were laid down in the slave law.

Many slave management manuals published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suggested that planters give their slave women a monetary reward for every successful birth. For example, planter Paul Gibbs suggested in his *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes* (1788) a reward of five shillings.<sup>3</sup> It was not only those with a direct interest in the plantation economy who articulated the idea of cash reward. John Baker Holroyd, an MP and leading authority on commercial and agricultural matters, mentioned in 1790 in his defence of the slave trade that slave mothers should be given twenty shillings upon the child's first birthday.<sup>4</sup> In 1798 the Secretary of State, the Duke of Portland, asked the governor of Jamaica to encourage the House of Assembly to adopt a law that would bestow

some marks of distinction or favour, such as a difference of dress, and some pecuniary annual rewards on such parents as shall have reared a child . . . and rewards and encouragement to such midwives as shall have been particularly successful.<sup>5</sup>

These financial reward schemes were based on a perceived similarity between white women and slave women. Slave women were seen to possess, like their white counterparts, an innate appetite for material, consumer pleasures.<sup>6</sup> This quality was regarded as dangerous for white women because it diverted their attention from their role as homemaker. In the case of slave women, however, colonialists did not regard it as a

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<sup>3</sup>P. Gibbs, *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes*, 2d ed. (London, 1788), 23.

<sup>4</sup>J. Baker Holroyd, *Observations on the Project for Abolishing the Slave Trade and on the Reasonableness of Attempting Some Practicable Mode of Relieving the Negroes* (London, 1790), reprinted in P. J. Kitson, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period* (London: Pickering and Cato, 1999), vol. 2, *The Abolition Debate*, 364. Further references to this pamphlet are to this version.

<sup>5</sup>*Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 122, 65.

<sup>6</sup>On the late eighteenth century debate about women and consumption, see C. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 191-93.

danger to be controlled and redirected but as an opportunity to be exploited.<sup>7</sup> Hence from the early 1780s onwards planters began to provide slave women who had given birth material rewards, such as a bottle of rum, baby clothes and extra allowances of food.<sup>8</sup> By the beginning of the nineteenth century, most supplemented these with financial payments. For example, in 1801 slave women from Clifton estate received two dollars for each successful birth in addition to the usual material rewards.<sup>9</sup>

Many planters divided the monetary reward between the slave mother and the midwife who had assisted her. The reward was usually handed out several weeks after the delivery in order to ensure that the planters' investment would pay off.<sup>10</sup> On the estate of the novelist M. G. (Monk) Lewis, slave mothers and midwives received a dollar each when they showed the overseer a healthy baby two weeks after its birth.<sup>11</sup> Like the Duke of Portland, Lewis was of the opinion that money and material goods were insufficient as incentives to motherhood. Drawing upon the metropolitan discourse of womanhood which strongly enhanced the prestige of motherhood, Lewis argued that slave mothers should also be given honour and respect. He gave new mothers a 'scarlet girdle with a silver medal in the centre' which entitled them to 'marks of peculiar respect and attention', such as being one of the first to be served breakfast in the field. On every additional child, an additional medal was to be affixed to the belt entitling the mother to

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<sup>7</sup> To control this dangerous quality, women in the metropolitan society were urged to redirect their desire for consumer goods towards purchases for the home and family. Colonialists used the quality not only to encourage reproduction but also to avert abolitionist criticism. Their remarks about the dresses and jewellery worn by slave women at social occasions served to show that slavery was not that bad. In other debates colonialists also argued that giving slave women money was a means to civilise them, as it whetted their appetite for possessions.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, G. Mathison, *Notices Respecting Jamaica in 1808-1809-1810* (London, 1811), 91; and J. Kelly, *Voyage to Jamaica and Seventeen Years' Residence in That Island*, 2d ed. (Belfast, 1838), 34.

<sup>9</sup> F. Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal: Jamaica One Hundred Years Ago Reprinted from a Journal Kept by Maria, Lady Nugent, from 1801 to 1815, Issued for Private Circulation in 1839* (London, 1907), 37.

<sup>10</sup> Barry Higman has suggested that it also served as a safeguard against infanticide. *Slave Populations*, 349.

<sup>11</sup> M. G. Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor: Kept during a Residence in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1838), 125.

more privileges.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this pronatalist measure was also a means to avert abolitionist criticism. Abolitionists regarded the monetary reward as a far more degrading practice than the purchase of slaves from Africa and presented it as proof of the backwardness of white Jamaican society.<sup>13</sup> The girdle then also had to deny the abolitionist accusation that Jamaican planters were nothing but indecent materialists.

The financial reward scheme became law in 1792. It was stipulated that on estates showing natural increase, the owner was to pay the overseer three pounds to be divided equally between the slave mother, the midwife and the nurse.<sup>14</sup> The clause was repealed in 1827 on the grounds that

it proved to be a source of jealousy and ill-will amongst the slaves on a property; the mother who had lost her child before the age when the premium was received, envying her more fortunate fellow servants, and in many cases inducing abortions.<sup>15</sup>

This 'blame-the-victim' rhetoric covered the real reason for the repeal: a decline in profits. The following table shows that sugar planters - who employed the majority of the slaves - faced a severe depression in the 1820s<sup>16</sup>:

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Beckles, 'Female Enslavement', 177.

<sup>14</sup>*PP* 1818, vol. XVII, 130. This pronatalist measure was also common practice on estates that did not show natural increase.

<sup>15</sup>*The Consolidated Slave Law, Passed the 22d December, 1826, Commencing on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1827 with a Commentary, Shewing the Differences between the New Law and the Repealed Enactment* (n.p.: Courant Office, 1827), iv. Hereafter cited as *1826 Slave Law*.

<sup>16</sup> Although sugar was less dominant in determining the character of slavery in this period, it still employed 53 per cent of all slaves. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 67.



Table 1. Estimates of Average Rates of Profit of Sugar Estates (per cent)

1763-1775	8.9
1776-1782	3.0
1783-1791	6.4
1792-1798	13.9
1799-1819	9.6
1820-1834	5.3

Source: J. R. Ward, 'The Profitability of Sugar Planting in the British West Indies, 1650-1834', in H. Beckles and V. A. Shepherd, eds. *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A Student Reader* (London: Ian Randle, 1991), 87.

The planters' bloc in the House of Assembly pressed for the repeal in order to enable sugar planters to reduce their costs and hence sustain their profits.<sup>17</sup> It rationalised its course of action with the image of an indifferent and selfish slave mother. It indirectly argued that Jamaican slave mothers were more interested in their material status than in the lives of their own and other women's offspring. Evidence suggests that in spite of this legal change many planters continued to reward women for delivering healthy infants, though less often financially.<sup>18</sup> After August 1834, however, most planters discontinued the reward scheme.<sup>19</sup>

Although it was less often mentioned in slave management manuals and practised by planters, the other inducement to fertility also received its statutory basis in

<sup>17</sup> The abolition of the slave trade affected the planters' production costs, as slaves became more expensive. Especially the price of slave women increased. See Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 39-40.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, *Evidence upon Oath Touching the Condition and Treatment of the Negro Population of the British West India Colonies*, part 1, *Island of Jamaica* (London, 1833), 50; and Kelly, *Voyage to Jamaica*, 34.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, J. Sturge and T. Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837; Being the Journal of a Visit to Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, Barbadoes and Jamaica* (London, 1838), 336.

1792.<sup>20</sup> Clause XXXVI of the Slave Law of the year stated that 'every mother who shall have six children living shall be exempted from hard labour in the field or otherwise and their owners from taxes.'<sup>21</sup> The legislation was kept in force until emancipation. The latter part of the clause reveals most clearly the influence of abolitionist campaigning. The tax exemption had to induce planters to take better care of their slave women. Economic factors also account for its early statutory status. This incentive cost planters very little as relatively few women qualified for the exemption. On Mesopotamia estate, for instance, only 1.4 per cent of the slave women aged 25 to 34 were exempted from labour in the field on account of the number of their living children.<sup>22</sup> Planters gradually realised that because so few women qualified for the exemption, the clause failed to function as an incentive to breed. In 1816 the clause was amended so as to include adopted children.<sup>23</sup> This amendment interacted with slave women's ideology of good mothering. Many slave women received respect and recognition within the slave community for adopting children whose mothers had died in childbirth, had been sold away or who for whatever reason were unable to rear their children. The status of these women should be seen within the light of the slaves' elevation of motherhood. Slave women were valued above all for their ability to mother. Childless women were objects of contempt, derision or compassion, while adoption was formalised into an acceptable substitute for natural motherhood.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Holroyd suggested that planters should grant 'certain exemptions from labour to those who bring up a specified number of children.' *Observations*, 364-65.

<sup>21</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 350.

<sup>22</sup> Dunn, 'Sugar Production', 63.

<sup>23</sup> *PP* 1818, vol. XVII, 130.

<sup>24</sup> On the importance that slave women attached to motherhood, see my article 'The Agonies of a Negress at the Loss of Her Children', *Women's History Notebooks* 6, 2 (199), 8-15. Various historians have argued that the elevation of motherhood within the slave community was a carry-over from Africa. See, for instance, Mair, 'The Arrival of Black Women'; and Bush, 'Hard Labour'.

Monk Lewis mentioned several mothers with adopted children in the journal he kept during two visits to his Jamaican estates in the mid-1810s. His remarks not only illustrate how common adoption was in the slave community but also show that white contemporaries perceived this practice to be at odds with the white, middle-class ideology of motherhood.<sup>25</sup> Lewis idealised this difference, as is shown most clearly in his account of Christian who visited two of her children in the estate hospital:

One of her own, and the other an adopted infant, whom she reared upon the death of its mother in child-birth; and there she sits, throwing her eyes from one to the other with such unceasing solicitude, that no one could discover which was her own child and which the orphan.<sup>26</sup>

Lewis' idealisation can be understood as giving expression to his idea of proper motherhood. The adopted mother possessed in his opinion an attribute of motherhood that mothers in his own society either lacked or possessed only in a small degree: unconditional maternal love.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the period of slavery, colonialists regularly invoked the practice of exempting women with six or more children from field labour to take some of the wind out of the sails of the abolitionists. Planter Anthony Davis, for instance, mentioned a conversation between a planter and his slaves in his pamphlet *The West Indies* (1832) in which the former tried to show the latter that their situation was favourable compared to that of English labourers. The planter told a slave woman that her daughter had 'an extra day in the week, in consequence of her having five children' and that 'as soon as she has

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<sup>25</sup> Adoption in the metropolitan society was usually confined to children of relatives who had died. See Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 321-22.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 176.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis was one of many contemporaries who were of the opinion that good mothering consisted of more than ensuring the infant's physical needs. For an overview of the development of maternal love in Western European societies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see E. Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: Collins, 1976), chap. 5.

six, she will be exempted from all manner of labour.<sup>28</sup> The Jamaica Abolition Act of 1833 turned this legal practice into a voluntary indulgence.<sup>29</sup> Statements of apprenticed women suggest that most planters did not hesitate to send mothers with six or more children back to the field. Janette Saunders, for instance, mentioned that: 'Before the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1834, I used to sit down, on account of my large family; but I was put in the field directly after the new law came in.'<sup>30</sup>

Economic factors explain to some extent why Jamaican planters discontinued this incentive as well as the cash reward after 1834. Firstly, the infants were free and would thus not necessarily work for them in the future. Secondly, under the Abolition Act planters could only claim 40 1/2 hours work per person per week. To ensure that their plantations remained operative and perhaps even yielded a small profit, planters not only tried to cut their costs but also brought about changes in the labour force. They sent categories of slaves back to the field who had previously been exempted from work, while providing certain apprentices with more labour-intensive jobs. As the amount of money planters spent on material and monetary rewards was little due to the low birth rate - 28.7 per 1,000 in 1832 - and mothers with six or more children were among the least productive members of the labour force, the discontinuation of these incentives cannot solely be explained in terms of economic considerations.<sup>31</sup> It was also triggered by the planters' loss of proprietary and arbitrary power over their labour force. Under the Abolition Act, they had not only lost their power to own their labourers and their infants but also to punish them as they saw fit. The withdrawal of the incentives could thus be

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<sup>28</sup>[A. Davis], *The West Indies* (London, 1832), 3. For a similar account, see R. Hibbert, *Hints to the Young Jamaica Sugar Planter* (London, 1825), 14.

<sup>29</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 401. Every Assembly had to provide supplementary legislation to the Abolition Act. The act that the Jamaican Assembly passed in December 1833 was very restrictive and caused much friction between the Assembly and the Colonial Office. It was amended four times between July 1834 and March 1838. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 168-69.

<sup>30</sup>*PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 218. See also the statements of Amaryllis Gale and Nancy Webb, 213 and 219.

considered as a means used by the planters to retain maximum control over what they saw as a dwindling labour force.

### Pregnancy

From the late 1780s onwards Jamaican planters began to provide a basic form of prenatal care. Pregnant field women were transferred from the first to the second gang in the later stages of pregnancy and all pregnant women were completely withdrawn from work six to four weeks before the delivery.<sup>32</sup> In addition, planters slightly modified the flogging of mothers-to-be. Rather than flogging them in the usual way, that is hands tied to a tree and their feet a few inches from the floor, the women were either allowed to hold their hands above their head or to lie down on the ground with their bellies in a specially dug hole. The number of lashes a pregnant woman was given, however, did not differ from other slave women.<sup>33</sup>

This form of prenatal care was to some extent influenced by the metropolitan literature on childbirth which recommended among others that pregnant women should be subjected to regular medical examinations, moderate exercise and regulated diets and should be provided with maternity wear.<sup>34</sup> There are three reasons why planters did not fully adopt this sophisticated system of prenatal care. Firstly, they were unwilling to compromise their short-term profits (see Table 1). A more elaborate system of prenatal

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<sup>31</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 308. The birth rate fluctuated between 29.1 and 28.7 in the period 1817-1832 and was the lowest in the British Caribbean.

<sup>32</sup> The second field gang was made up of young slaves and weaker adults who were employed in auxiliary tasks such as tending the nursery canes and carrying dry trash to feed the mill. Contrary to other West India colonies, the reductions in labour demands of pregnant women were never made law. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 166-67 and 350.

<sup>33</sup> Slave women could be given up to 39 lashes. On the flogging of pregnant women, see the statements of Dr. Jackson, Henry Coor, Lieutenant Baker-Davison, and William Fitzmaurice in *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82.

care would not only have increased their costs but also reduced their output levels. Secondly, the colonial setting prevented a more substantial form of prenatal care. For example, in 1795 there were only 50 trained doctors in the island, far from enough to examine all pregnant slave women on a regular basis.<sup>35</sup> Finally, planters feared that anything more than the above-mentioned changes in labour demands and the punishment regime would upset the delicate balance of power on the estates. Nutritious diets, maternity wear and other indulgences would in their opinion make the women forget their inferior status as slaves and would withdraw them from the control of the estate officers.

A large number of colonialists, mostly residents, warned planters against completely exempting slave women from work during the last stages of their pregnancy. Dr. Collins mentioned, for instance, in 1803 that pregnant women should be 'kept in motion until the last hour.'<sup>36</sup> Drawing upon the idea expressed in the metropolitan society that childbirth was easier if women 'exercised moderately' up to the delivery, they argued that the survival rate of the infants would be enhanced if pregnant women were employed in some light work until the last minute.<sup>37</sup> The real motive behind their proposal was of course not the health of the infants but the productivity of the mothers-to-be. Their proposal was accompanied by three mother images that served to cover this economic motive. Firstly, the lazy slave mother. The slave management manual *Hints to the Young Jamaica Sugar Planter* (1825) by

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<sup>34</sup> Branca, *Women in Europe*, 114-16.

<sup>35</sup> The number increased to 200 in 1833, that is about one doctor to every 1,500 slaves. See Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves*, 276.

<sup>36</sup> Collins, *Practical Rules for the Management and Medical Treatment of Negro Slaves in the Sugar Colonies* (London, 1803), 158. Similar suggestions can be found in: W. Sells, *Remarks on the Condition of the Slaves in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1823; reprint, Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972), 17; *The Edinburgh Review and the West Indies* (Glasgow, 1816), 140; and J. M. Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments against the Abolition of the Slave Trade with a Defence of the Proprietors of the British Sugar Colonies* (London, 1790), 122.

planter Robert Hibbert mentioned, for instance, that 'it requires judgement to extract a sufficient exertion for her health, for her *natural* [emphasis mine] indolence is such that without control, she would sit down from the first certainty of conception.'<sup>38</sup>

Planter Henry De La Beche supported his proposal with the image of an ignorant slave mother: 'The intention being merely to keep her in sight and prevent her from carrying heavy loads for herself, which she would most probably do, if permitted to ramble over the neighbourhood.'<sup>39</sup> A third image is that of the troublesome slave mother. The manual *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes* told planters to employ pregnant women 'upon some business that will oblige them to make their appearance; for you must be very attentive that they do not ramble out of the plantation.'<sup>40</sup> This manual, in other words, perceived pregnant slave women as a threat to the stability of the estates that needed to be contained by keeping them in sight of the estate personnel.

All three images emphasised the difference of slave women, that is their deviation from the metropolitan standard of motherhood. The latter stipulated that a good mother ensured the physical well-being of her children by carrying out proper mothering practices and providing them with material sustenance and also met their emotional needs.<sup>41</sup> Pregnant slave women endangered, according to these colonialists, the physical survival of their infants because they failed to exercise proper mothering

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<sup>37</sup> For an overview of metropolitan ideas about the labour demands of pregnant women, see E. Shorter, *Women's Bodies: A Social History of Women's Encounter with Health, Ill-Health and Medicine* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 170.

<sup>38</sup> Hibbert, *Hints to the Planter*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> H. T. De La Beche, *Notes on the Present Condition of the Negroes in Jamaica* (London, 1825), 12. For similar remarks, see A. Barclay, *A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies* (London, 1827), 434 and G. Frankcklyn, *Observations Occasioned by the Attempts Made in England to Affect the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Shewing, the Manner in which Negroes are Treated in the British Colonies in the West Indies* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1788), 36.

<sup>40</sup> Gibbs, *Instructions*, 14. For a similar remark, see *Edinburgh Review and the West Indies*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> For more information on this norm, see Branca, *Women in Europe*, chap. 3.

skills. Hibbert's quote shows most clearly that this failure was traced to an inherent lack of: activity; mental capacity; or obedience.

A rather different mother image comes to the fore in colonialist writings that served to avert abolitionist criticism. The pregnant woman was presented as a lady of leisure. She hardly did any work from the moment she was visibly pregnant and was completely exempted from work during the last three months.<sup>42</sup> This image was clearly based on a perceived similarity of slave women with their English counterparts. In fact, several colonialists argued that slave women were better equipped to live up to the metropolitan standard of motherhood than lower-class English women. For instance, James Tobin wrote in 1805 in his critique of Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the Sugar Colonies* that 'their situation under these circumstances will more than bear a comparison with the lot of the lower order of females in Great Britain, whom we frequently see taken in labour in the harvest-field, or at the washing-tub.'<sup>43</sup>

Remarks about the punishment regime of pregnant women relied solely upon images of slave mothers as different from their English counterparts. In the 1820s and early 1830s abolitionists expressed great outrage about the flogging of pregnant women, arguing among others that it prevented natural increase.<sup>44</sup> Colonialists responded either by arguing that the practice did not occur or by blaming the women themselves.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Barclay, *Practical View*, 318; and J. McQueen, *The West India Colonies: The Calumnies and Misrepresentations Circulated against Them by the Edinburgh Review* (London, 1824), 259. *The Edinburgh Review* was a propaganda means of the abolitionist movement. It regularly devoted space to slavery in the years 1823-1830. The abolitionist cause received in this period also support from other periodicals - *Westminster Review* and *Eclectic Review*- and newspapers, such as the *Morning Chronicle*. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 84.

<sup>43</sup> [Tobin], *Cursory Remarks upon the Reverend Mr. Ramsay's Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the Sugar Colonies* (London, 1785) 80. For a similar comparison, see *Evidence upon Oath*, 18. The texts of slavery and abolition formed thus what Edward Said has called a 'strategic formation'. The texts referred to, and relied upon, each other. As a result, they required referential power first among themselves and thereafter in culture at large. See E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; reprint, London: Peregrine Books, 1985), 20.

<sup>44</sup> This outrage will be examined in more detail in chap. 6.

<sup>45</sup> For a denial of the practice, see Hibbert, *Hints to the Planter*, 13.



Planter Robert Scott told the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery that no estate officer would flog a slave woman knowing her to be pregnant.<sup>46</sup> He implied that the women who were flogged in a pregnant state either did not know that they were pregnant or cared so little about their offspring that they did not inform the overseer or driver who applied the whip about their condition. This image of the ignorant and indifferent slave mother also dominated the 1823 court case relating to the miscarriage of Betsy Chambers. Several of her fellow bondsmen told the slave court that her miscarriage was the result of a severe flogging. Their complaint was dismissed on the grounds that there was 'no certain proof of Betsy having been in a state of pregnancy or miscarried.' The court based its conclusion on the testimony of the book-keeper who mentioned that Betsy had never informed him about her pregnancy.<sup>47</sup> The mother image in the debate about the flogging of pregnant women then served to divert the blame for natural decrease from the planters to the women themselves. Chapter six will show that it was also used to justify a practice which colonialists believed to be essential for their enterprises.

The economic and non-economic factors that accounted for the withdrawal of the two legal inducements to fertility also explain the deterioration in the situation of pregnant women after August 1834. They were given a heavier workload and were required to work longer into pregnancy.<sup>48</sup> Although the Abolition Act forbade the flogging of female apprentices, pregnant apprentices continued to be subjected to the lash. This, however, no longer took place on the estate but in the workhouse. Female

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<sup>46</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 349.

<sup>47</sup> Case of January 1823, Jamaica Archives, St. George Slave Trials 1822-1831, 2/18/6. The complaint was launched by her fellow bondsmen as Betsy was confined to the stocks.

<sup>48</sup> See the statements of John Jeremie and R. R. Madden before the 1836 Select Committee on the Apprenticeship in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 24 and 61-63; and Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 184, 280 and 336. The withdrawal of these indulgences and those given to lying-in and nursing women was in accordance with the Abolition Act. The Act stated that only those indulgences that had been prescribed in the colonial laws ought to be continued; the Slave Law had not prescribed these indulgences. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 175.

apprentices who had done their work insufficiently or had committed other minor offences were sent to the workhouse where they had to work in the penal gang and dance the treadmill. Women who failed to keep step on the mill or performed insufficient labour were given a severe flogging. Pregnant women were not treated differently from other female inmates. Their treatment led in many cases to premature births and miscarriages.<sup>49</sup> It was not until December 1837 that the colonial governor instructed S.M.s to exempt pregnant women from the workhouse and 'devise some occupation for them during their extra hours on the plantation suited to their state of infirmity.'<sup>50</sup>

This drastic change in prenatal care was accompanied by a change in mother images. Pregnant women were no longer presented as lazy, indifferent and ignorant mothers but were solely seen as troublemakers. The 'colonialist' S.M. Pryce informed governor Sligo in March 1836 that pregnant apprentices 'defy all authority and show an ungrateful feeling with insulting conduct.'<sup>51</sup> His remark had an element of truth in it. Evidence suggests that pregnant apprentices fiercely resisted the changes in their labour demands. A woman from the Fairfield plantation, for instance, spent a week in the workhouse because she had refused to do 'anything but light work after her six month.'<sup>52</sup>

### **The Delivery**

Before 1780 childbirth on Jamaican estates was a collective female activity. The women gave birth in their own hut surrounded by a midwife, a nurse and several slave women. The midwife was usually an elderly, African-born slave woman who used

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<sup>49</sup> Chap. 7 describes the punishment regime of female apprentices in more detail.

<sup>50</sup> Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), Colonial Office Series (hereafter C.O.) 137/231.

<sup>51</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 349. For similar remarks, see *PP* 1837, LIII, 75; and *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 308. S.M.s were required to write a report based on a diary that was to be written up from day to day. Many reports were reprinted in the *Parliamentary Papers*. For more information on the reports and how they differed from those by S.M.s in other colonies, see Burn, *Emancipation*, 207-08.

various herbs, charms and applied various techniques to speed up the delivery and deal with complications. After the delivery, she dressed the baby in flannel or some other cloth and reported its birth to the overseer. As few planters were willing to pay the extra fee charged by estate doctors for midwifery, white medical men were usually absent from the scene.<sup>53</sup>

Based on the assumption that the hut and the midwife were conducive to high infant mortality rates - 25 to 50 per cent of all live births died - proposals were put forward to 'medicalise' childbirth, that is to move childbirth within the orbit of the estate hospital.<sup>54</sup> They were influenced by the European discourse on and changes in childbirth practices. From the late eighteenth century onwards more and more children in Western European countries were delivered by doctors and/or trained midwives. In addition, specialised lying-in hospitals and midwifery schools were established in several European countries.<sup>55</sup> Underlying the proposals was the image of the ignorant slave mother. She was seen as unaware of the effects of the smoke and draft in her hut and the midwife's lack of obstetrical skill and knowledge on her own health and that of her infant. James Adair, who had lived in the West Indies for twenty years, mentioned in his 1790 defence of the slave trade that a clean and warm lying-in room in the estate hospital would protect 'many more new born children' from tetanus and other

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<sup>52</sup> Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 407.

<sup>53</sup> This description is based on: the statements of Henry Coor, Lieutenant Baker-Davison and William Fitzmaurice in *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82; H. McNeill, *Observations on the Treatment of the Negroes in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1788), 35; PRO, C.O. 137/226, no. 1157; R. Renny, *A History of Jamaica* (London, 1807), 208; Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 164; and Mathison, *Notices*, 29. Estate doctors were paid annually and charged extra fees for certain services. See Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves*, 296.

<sup>54</sup> Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, 49. In a more recent demographic study, Higman has estimated a male infant death rate of 298 per 1,000 and a female death rate of 248. This compares favourable to other West India colonies. In St. Lucia, Tobago and Trinidad, for instance, the male infant mortality rate was 583 and that of girls 479. *Slave Populations*, 319.

<sup>55</sup> Branca, *Women in Europe*, 117 and Shorter, *Women's Bodies*, 36-43 and 54. The hospitals were few in numbers and catered primarily for the poor.

infant diseases.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the slave mother was often presented as the innocent victim of the midwife. Historian Robert Renny, for instance, argued in 1807 that the lockjaw, a tetanus-like disease, arose from

the want of skill, or inattention of the black midwives, who, like their fairer sisters in Europe, are always illiterate, generally careless, and often intoxicated. This inattention is often displayed by their neglecting to purge off the meconium; by their dividing the umbilical cord with a blunt, lacerating instrument, and applying stimulant applications to it; and by their neglecting to provide for the comfort of the mother, who is generally exposed to cold, by lying in a wretched hut.<sup>57</sup>

Three suggestions were put forward to combat the harmful effects of the untrained midwife. Firstly, planters should allocate a greater role to the estate doctor in childbirth. He should not only provide assistance in case of emergencies but also regularly visit the women in the lying-in room.<sup>58</sup> Practical and economic considerations prevented planters from adopting this proposal. The lack of doctors in the island and their dislike of obstetrics made it extremely difficult to allocate a greater role to the doctor. Even if there had been enough willing doctors in the island, few planters would have opted to compromise their short-term profits by paying estate doctors the extra fee they charged for midwifery.

Secondly, midwives should be given a reward for successful births. As we have seen, this suggestion was enthusiastically taken up by planters and was even made law. Finally, planters should provide midwives with training in proper midwifery skills. Although they all agreed that only 'intelligent' slave women should be trained as midwives, they differed as to whether these should be elderly, African

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<sup>56</sup> Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 247. The biggest killers of slave infants in the late eighteenth century were lockjaw, smallpox, measles, yaws and worm diseases. See, for instance, the statements of John Quier and Adam Anderson, two Jamaican doctors, in *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 69.

<sup>57</sup> Renny, *History of Jamaica*, 207. For similar remarks, see *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 69, 277; [Dr. Grainger], *An Essay on the More Common West India Diseases* (London, 1814), 15; and Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 247.

women or young women born in the island. James Chisholme, a former Jamaican doctor and member of the House of Assembly, told the committee of the Privy Council that investigated the nature of the slave trade (hereafter Slave Trade Committee) that the infant mortality rate would not decline 'while we are obliged to employ *negroes* [emphasis mine] as midwives'.<sup>59</sup> Dr. Collins, on the other hand, was convinced that 'any elderly, sensible, prudent woman who has born children' would suffice.<sup>60</sup> They also disagreed about the format of the training. Dr. Collins favoured a 'few lessons from any gentlemen of the faculty, or even one from her own sex' that would teach the midwife 'not to attempt too much, and to demand other assistance, when the presentation of the child is not according to nature'.<sup>61</sup> Planter Mathison, on the other hand, suggested that the midwife should learn 'a judicious method of managing infants' by 'living in families of white people'.<sup>62</sup>

Few planters embarked upon a training scheme for midwives.<sup>63</sup> Their reluctance stemmed only partly from economic and practical considerations. The latter includes not only the lack of doctors but also the fact that there were not many white families in the island and that their racial ideas were such that few were willing to teach young slave women the proper midwifery skills.<sup>64</sup> The most important reason, however, why planters refrained from training midwives is that they were of the opinion that such an intervention would upset the established order.<sup>65</sup> They

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<sup>58</sup> See Sells, *Remarks on the Condition*, 16; Mathison, *Notices*, 90; and Collins, *Practical Rules*, 160.

<sup>59</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 69, 277. The Slave Trade Committee was established in February 1788 and published its report in April 1789. It consisted of six parts of which the third dealt with the treatment of slaves in the West Indies. See J. Gratus, *The Great White Lie: Slavery, Emancipation, and Changing Radical Attitudes* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 51.

<sup>60</sup> Collins, *Practical Rules*, 159.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. Dr. William Sells also favoured this method. *Remarks on the Condition*, 18.

<sup>62</sup> Mathison, *Notices*, 29.

<sup>63</sup> Sells, *Remarks on the Condition*, 18; and McNeill, *Observations*, 35.

<sup>64</sup> In 1810 whites made up 6.9 per cent of the total population in Jamaica. The planters' policy to employ only single men as estate officers meant that few whites lived in families. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 77.

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Mathison, *Notices*, 91.

realised that the midwife was held in such high esteem in the slave community that changes in her role would be actively resisted. Planter Thomas Roughly described the slave midwife's status most clearly in his slave management manual *The Jamaica Planter's Guide* (1823):

They impress, by the nature of their office and by such assertions, such an awe and reverence for them on the minds of all classes of slaves, that few practising doctors wish to encounter them, or be called in to assist at a birth or give relief to a female slave in travail, which those harpies [cruel women] attend.<sup>66</sup>

Historians of New World slavery have suggested that the status of the midwife in the slave community depended on the fact that she served as a link with the African past. She not only used herbs, charms and techniques that were carried over from Africa but also delivered babies that were regarded in the slave community as gifts from the African ancestors.<sup>67</sup> Untrained midwives in European societies at the time, however, were held in similar awe. A German doctor mentioned in the late eighteenth century that mothers preserved 'a deep silence about the midwives' means of accelerating labour and managing the lying-in period.'<sup>68</sup> It therefore seems that the slave midwife's status was also based on the fact that she had special knowledge, handed down from generation to generation, which was believed to be of great good to her patients. Like her European counterpart, she was convinced that her obstetrical knowledge was sufficient.<sup>69</sup> James Chisholme mentioned, for instance, that she was averse to 'executing the directions of white people.'<sup>70</sup> It was thus only the planters and their

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<sup>66</sup> T. Roughly, *The Jamaica Planter's Guide* (London, 1823), 96.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, D. G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 116; and Mair, 'The Arrival of Black Women', 5.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Shorter, *Women's Bodies*, 38-39.

<sup>69</sup> For information on the training of European midwives, see *ibid.*, 40.

<sup>70</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 69, 277.

white employees who believed that the slave midwife was untrained. Slave mothers believed that her knowledge was completely valid.

Planters not only failed to allocate a greater role to the estate doctor in deliveries and train the slave midwife, they also did not succeed in moving childbirth to the orbit of the estate hospital. Although lying-in rooms were established on larger plantations from 1790 onwards, few slave women used them. This led planter Robert Hibbert to conclude in 1825 that the establishment of lying-in rooms was a 'questionable' policy.<sup>71</sup> It failed, in his opinion, to reduce infant mortality rates because of slave women's ignorance and obstinacy.<sup>72</sup> Planters, however, were unwilling to make this policy a success by adopting James Adair's suggestion to 'inflict' the lying-in room upon the women.<sup>73</sup> They seem to have realised that there was a point when the transgression of the boundaries between their own world and that of the slave women would undermine rather than enhance their control over the female labour force. A few planters attempted to persuade women to use the room by offering them a reward.<sup>74</sup> The majority, however, adopted Hibbert's policy of allowing lying-in women the choice between the lying-in room and their own hut. To combat the negative influences of the hut, they ensured that lying-in women were supplied with necessary food, clothes and medicine, were assisted by a full-time, albeit untrained, midwife and nurse and in the case of complications also by the estate doctor.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Hibbert, *Hints to the Planter*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Hibbert echoed here the words of James Chisholme who was convinced that the high infant mortality rate was due to the women's 'ignorance, obstinacy and inattention.' *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 69, 277.

<sup>73</sup> Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 247.

<sup>74</sup> Mathison, *Notices*, 29.

<sup>75</sup> Hibbert, *Hints to the Planter*, 13. Prior to 1780 most midwives performed their duties part-time, like Phillis from Mesopotamia who was removed from gang labour in 1763 at the age of 43 and worked thereafter occasionally as midwife and nurse. See Dunn, 'Sugar Production', 64-65. The statement of Mary Ann Slater in *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLXIX, 252 gives an insight into the experiences of slave midwives in the 1820s. The planters' reliance upon midwives in their project of natural increase is

Thus in spite of all the suggestions to medicalise childbirth, the birthing scene on Jamaican estates changed little after 1780. It underwent more drastic changes during the Apprenticeship System. On many estates women who had served as full-time midwives were sent back to the field.<sup>76</sup> They were still expected to assist the women in childbirth, even during their free time, but were no longer given the customary reward for successful births.<sup>77</sup> In addition, there were estates that continued to employ full-time midwives but at the expense of the apprenticed women themselves. The women usually 'paid' for the midwife by working extra time for their employer.<sup>78</sup> Planters thus regarded the midwife like the inducements to fertility and the prenatal care, as an extra-legal allowance that should not be maintained gratuitously.

### **The Lying-In Period**

Until the early 1780s slave women experienced a lying-in period of three to four weeks. During this period the estate doctor did not see them unless there were complications and they were seldom provided with nourishing food, babyclothes and bedlinen.<sup>79</sup> This lack of postnatal care was sustained by an image of slave women as predisposed by nature to recover easily after childbirth. Lady Nugent, wife of the colonial governor, wrote in 1802 that she had heard doctors in the island saying that

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above all reflected in the value of slave midwives. In the late 1780s, a midwife could fetch anything between 150 and 200 pounds, whereas a field woman was valued between 75 to 85 pounds. Mair, *Women Field Workers*, 174.

<sup>76</sup> Between August 1834 and August 1835 midwives on eighteen estates in the parish of Vere were dismissed and sent back to the field. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 37 and 372.

<sup>77</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 252.

<sup>78</sup> Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 336; and *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 329.

<sup>79</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 90 and 222.



white and to some extent also mulatto women recovered far less easily than black women.<sup>80</sup>

From the 1780s onwards most planters extended the period of lying-in and provided lying-in women with baby clothes, medicine, extra allowances of sugar, rice and flour and sometimes even specially cooked meals.<sup>81</sup> Colonialists used these changes to deny abolitionist criticism about the treatment of slave women. They especially emphasised the length of the lying-in period, which in their opinion compared favourable to that of lower-class English women who were usually given no more than four days' recess after the delivery.<sup>82</sup> In the mid-1820s when the abolitionist campaign for emancipation became more fervent, favourable accounts of the lying-in period not only increased but also became more rose-coloured. The dominant mother image in these accounts was not surprisingly that of the lady of leisure. For instance, James McQueen, a member of the West India Committee, wrote in 1824 that the slave woman was 'never required to turn out to do any work, till six weeks or two months after her delivery.'<sup>83</sup>

Postnatal care did not feature prominently in slave management manuals and colonialist tracts that discussed the problem of natural decrease. This suggests that colonialists defined the latter largely in terms of slave women's ability to carry their children full-term.<sup>84</sup> Only two proposals to change postnatal care were mentioned: an extension of the lying-in period and the withdrawal of the wetnurse who fed the baby for the first nine days. The latter custom was regarded as an obstacle to natural increase

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<sup>80</sup> Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 94.

<sup>81</sup> See, for instance, *Negro Apprenticeship in the British Colonies* (London, 1838), 20; and Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 335.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, [Tobin], *Cursory Remarks*, 80; and *Edinburgh Review and the West Indies*, 140.

<sup>83</sup> McQueen, *The West India Colonies*, 260.

<sup>84</sup> On the colonialist debate about natural decrease, see Higman, *Slave Populations*, chap. 9; and Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves*, chap. 8. The lack of proposals regarding postnatal care also reflects the state of the metropolitan debate about motherhood. It was not until the early twentieth century that postnatal care came to occupy a prominent role in this debate. See Branca, *Women in Europe*, 119-20.

because the nurse's milk was of an inferior quality. While former resident Henry Coor blamed it on the conditions under which the wetnurse laboured, doctor John Quier attributed it to the fact that she nursed a child of one year or even older.<sup>85</sup> Such remarks were influenced by metropolitan childrearing manuals which argued that breastfeeding was a 'natural' thing that increased the survival chances of the infant and led to a stronger bond between mother and child.<sup>86</sup> Dr. Collins mentioned, for example, that 'nature' had disposed a slave child to suck and that planters should 'pursue her inclination.'<sup>87</sup> Slave women's obstruction of this course of nature was interpreted as either 'sheer ignorance' or 'wilful neglect.' Henry Coor, for instance, told the Slave Trade Committee that it was 'lamentable to think that they do not take proper care of these infants.'<sup>88</sup> It did not occur to these colonialists that the custom was related to the importance that slave women attached to an infant's first nine days. A newborn child was regarded as a visitor from the underworld which was spiritually harmless and became only part of the world when it was eight or nine days old. Until then the mother and also other slaves could 'ritually' neglect it by, for example, not giving it a name and not changing its clothes. The child's spiritual status also meant that its death generally evoked not very strong emotional responses.<sup>89</sup>

All the indulgences of lying-in women were withdrawn after August 1834. This was, however, not the only way in which the situation of lying-in women deteriorated under the Apprenticeship System. Many planters also forced new mothers to

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<sup>85</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 90; and *ibid.*, vol. 69, 279.

<sup>86</sup> For more information on the breastfeeding campaign in the metropolitan society, see L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* abr. and rev. ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977; reprint, London: Penguin, 1990 ), 270-72; and Branca, *Women in Europe*, 121.

<sup>87</sup> Collins, *Practical Rules*, 163.

<sup>88</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 90. For a similar remark, see [Grainger], *Essay on Diseases*, 16.

<sup>89</sup> Bush, 'Hard Labour', 94. For other mothering practices in this nine-day period, see Mathison, *Notices*, 29; and *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 69, 277 and 279.

pay back the time they had lost lying-in.<sup>90</sup> Women who refused to do so were sent to the S.M. Several S.M.'s who faced such cases doubted the legality of the practice and asked governor Sligo in October 1835 whether the Abolition Act exempted lying-in women from the 'liability to repay lost time'.<sup>91</sup> Sligo was of the opinion that childbirth was an illness and that new mothers therefore did not have to give extra service to their employer.<sup>92</sup> As he was aware that the Abolition Act had no particular clause upon the issue, he asked the Secretary of State, Lord Glenelg, whether he had interpreted the Act correctly. Glenelg arrived at the same conclusion:

I scarcely know how to argue in favour of the claim of women in childbirth to be exempted from all responsibility for their unavoidable absence from their duties.<sup>93</sup>

He was, however, less convinced than Sligo that the cases faced by the S.M.s were the result of the planters' ill will. According to Sligo, they stemmed from the fact that the children were of no use to them in the future:

While their offspring were of use to the proprietor, not one word was said about it [repaying lost time], but now that all those who are born are free, objection is made to it.<sup>94</sup>

Glenelg was 'most reluctant' to ascribe the cases to 'any considerable number of the proprietary body of the island'.<sup>95</sup> Thus contrary to Sligo, he could not conceive any white man disregarding women's primal duty: childbearing.

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<sup>90</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 333.

<sup>91</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 138.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

## Conclusions

Colonialist writings on pregnancy and childbirth contain a variety of mother images. Suggestions to alter slave women's customs regarding childbearing were accompanied by images of deficient mothers, while inducements to fertility and remarks to deny abolitionist accusations presented images of rather capable mothers. The latter image expressed the idea that there was no need to abolish slavery because slave women had all the means to be as good or even better mothers than their English counterparts.

There was not one particular image of the deficient slave mother but several, ranging from the slightly positive image of the ignorant mother who needed proper guidance in childbearing to the more negative image of the indifferent, selfish and troublesome mother who had to be 'bribed' or even forced into changing her childbearing customs. The dominance of the ignorant mother stemmed from the fact that this image served much better than the others to justify the project of slavery. It allowed colonialists to argue that the planters' interventions in childbearing practices were simply means to civilise the female slave population.

The mother images invoked by the colonialists changed over time. Although they presented images of slave mothers as similar to their white counterparts throughout the period, they were especially abundant in the 1820s and early 1830s when abolition of slavery loomed large. Another change occurred during the Apprenticeship System when mothers were solely depicted as troublemakers. This image served above all to convince the audience that the women were incapable of full freedom because they failed to carry out the duties associated with their apprenticeship.

Thus depending upon their project - rationalise changes in childbirth practices or avert abolitionist criticism - colonialists described slave women as either different

from or similar to English women. The following chapters will demonstrate that it was especially resident colonialists who used a language of difference, while absentee planters and pro-slavery supporters in England resorted more easily to a language of similarity.

It is above all in the proposals to alter slave women's childbirth practices that one can detect a link between the colonialist debate and the twin discourses of womanhood and motherhood in the metropolitan society. From the late eighteenth century onwards, women were more and more defined in terms of their maternal role. The latter required not only that they looked after their children's physical needs but also that they made sure that they were emotionally content and instructed in proper moral behaviour. Most colonialists only borrowed elements from these discourses that suited their aim of natural increase without a substantial loss of slave women's labour. They, for instance, seldom addressed the issue of maternal affection. Some colonialists, however, went further. They more or less offered the whole feminine ideal as a desired goal for slave women. Monk Lewis, for instance, was keen to see that slave mothers received the same respect as mothers in his own society.

The metropolitan discourses were no longer invoked during the Apprenticeship System. At the same time, a change occurred in the condition of pregnant and lying-in women. Planters reversed their condition back to the pre-1780 period and added several other hardships. This change in discourse and practice was primarily a response to the planters' loss of power and status under the Abolition Act. The following chapters will provide further evidence to support the thesis that women were conspicuous targets of planter hostility during the Apprenticeship System.

This chapter has not only examined the mother images that sustained the proposals to change childbirth practices and the metropolitan discourses that they

drew upon but has also addressed the question of to what extent Jamaican planters put them into practice. It has been argued that planters adopted only those proposals that were easy to implement in the colonial context, cost little, yielded high returns in the short-term, and did not drastically upset the balance of power on an estate.

## CHAPTER 2

### PICKENINY MUMMAS <sup>1</sup>

According to the colonialists, the work regimes that were in place on estates prior to 1780 did not enable nursing women sufficiently to meet their infants' nutritional needs and hence led to high infant mortality rates. They were of the opinion that planters should indulge nursing mothers if they wanted to bring about natural increase. The same motive underpinned their suggestion to subject slave women's weaning practices to planters' interference. It was argued that their prolonged breast-feeding had important implications for patterns of child spacing and hence for total fertility.<sup>2</sup> The first section analyses the proposals put forward by colonialists to alter nursing and weaning practices and shows the extent to which they were adopted. The second section examines the abolitionists' remarks about existing nursing practices and their proposals to enable slave women to be as good nurses as their white counterparts. The third section compares the mother images presented by both sides in the debate and shows that they were not only concerned about the effectiveness of existing nursing and weaning practices but also about the (lack of) affection that slave mothers bestowed on their children.

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<sup>1</sup> This term was commonly used by white and black Jamaicans to refer to nursing slave women.

<sup>2</sup> Without interference from their master, slave women breastfed for a period of 18 to 24 months. The lactation practices of Caribbean slave women have been the subject of various historical studies of slavery. Demographic studies have presented it as a factor that explains the fertility differentials between slave populations of North America and the Caribbean. See, for instance, J. S. Handler and R. S. Cornuccini, 'Weaning among West Indian Slaves: Historical and Bioanthropological Evidence from Barbados', *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (1986), 111-17. Social histories of slave women have emphasised the African roots of the long-lactation practice. See, for example, Bush's article 'Hard Labour' which argues that it was related to the two-year postnatal taboo on intercourse common in many West African societies at the time of the slave trade.

### 'If [Only] They Were Encouraged As Nurses'<sup>3</sup>

Before 1780 nursing women returned to the field three to four weeks after the delivery where they either worked with their children on their backs or left them on their own at the side of the field. Most of them were expected to work the same long hours and carry out the same hard work as the other slaves and were generally given little time to feed their infants.<sup>4</sup> From around the turn of the century, colonialists put forward proposals to ameliorate the condition of nursing women. They suggested that planters: reduce the workload of nursing women by exempting them from certain tasks and allowing them to start work later and return home earlier; provide them with extra allowances of food; and improve existing nursing arrangements.<sup>5</sup> As to the latter, some colonialists suggested that planters set up nurseries run by elderly slave women. The nursing mothers would be allowed to feed their children during their one-and-a-half hour lunch break, while for the rest of the day the infants would be given dietary supplements. A strong advocate of this arrangement was Dr. Collins. That he was not only concerned about the infants' physical needs but was also keen to see that they were emotionally content, can be deduced from his suggestion to equip the nurseries with cradles and allow the children 'to amuse themselves at play, either in the house, or out of it.'<sup>6</sup> Most colonialists, however, were solely interested in the infants' physical needs and proposed a nursing arrangement whereby mothers took their children to the field and left them in the care of an elderly woman while feeding them at regular intervals. For instance, planter Thomas Roughly,

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<sup>3</sup> W. Beckford, *Remarks upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica* (London, 1788), 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 58 and 101.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Gibbs, *Instructions*, 13-14; Collins, *Practical Rules*, 166; and Roughly, *Planter's Guide*, 103. These indulgences served of course not only to enhance the survival rate of the infants but also to encourage the women to breed more often. The women were to use the extra time in the morning to feed their infants so that they could work for several hours without interruption.

<sup>6</sup> Collins, *Practical Rules*, 167. This suggestion reflects the influence of the metropolitan literature on child rearing which strongly urged mothers to supply their children with toys to occupy and amuse themselves. See Branca, *Women in Europe*, 120.



with a view to extracting as much labour from nursing mothers as possible, proposed that

the mothers of sucking children should be provided with nurses to take care of the infants while they are at work in the fields, and a hut is made in a convenient place, to retire to, in case of stress of weather. One mother out of every four in the field should be allowed to go and suckle her child for a quarter of an hour, then succeeded by others, and so on, that the infants should not want.<sup>7</sup>

The proposals to indulge nursing mothers were supported by images of ignorant and indifferent mothers. Based on a twenty-years' residence in the West Indies, Jesse Foot concluded in 1805 that it was because of 'wrong treatment' and 'deserted attention' that so many slave children died.<sup>8</sup> Absentee planter William Beckford also drew upon the image of the ignorant mother to explain the high infant mortality rate. But contrary to Foot and other colonialists, he did not suggest that slave women lacked the mental capacity to nurse properly and also argued that they were far from indifferent about the welfare of their children:

I think that the women in general are tender of their children, particularly of those who are in a state of helplessness; and if they were encouraged as nurses, I am apt to believe that so many would not be lost within so short a period as nine days after their birth.<sup>9</sup>

Very few colonialists supported his conclusion that slave women were by nature endowed with maternal affection. The majority agreed with Foot that slave women's maternal affection differed from that of English women, both in terms of degree and kind. As to the latter, it was argued that it was not an emotion informed by reason but a sensation 'purely of a physical character . . . [which] might be properly denominated

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<sup>7</sup> Roughly, *Planter's Guide*, 102-03.

<sup>8</sup> J. Foot, *Observations Primarily upon the Speech of Mr. Wilberforce on His Motion in the House of Commons the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1804* (London, 1805), 96.

instinct.<sup>10</sup> It was also seen as an insincere emotion; slave women only expressed affection for their offspring if they thought that it would improve their working conditions or material status.<sup>11</sup>

Many colonialists argued that the high infant mortality rate was more the result of slave women's indifference towards their offspring than their ignorance of proper nursing practices. This was seldom as directly articulated as by James Adair in his *Unanswerable Arguments against the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1790):

One cause of the mortality of young slaves is the inattention of the mother, whose natural affection for her offspring does not seem in general to be so ardent as that of white women.<sup>12</sup>

It was most often expressed in specific accounts of indifferent mothers. Monk Lewis, for instance, told the story of a woman who had cared well for her child until ten days after its birth when she had received the material and monetary reward. She had then gone to a dance on a neighbouring estate and had left the baby so long without food that it eventually had died.<sup>13</sup> This account contrasts sharply with his story of the mother who looked after her adopted child in the hospital, mentioned in the previous chapter. It demonstrates most clearly the contradictory nature of colonialist discourse. Even within the work of one author, one can find images of slave women as different alongside those that stress their essential similarity with white women.

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<sup>9</sup> Beckford, *Remarks*, 24n.

<sup>10</sup> Rev. J. Riland, *Memoirs of a West India Planter* (London, 1827), 90. For a similar remark, see Collins, *Practical Rules*, 171.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *Edinburgh Review and the West Indies*, 52; Foot, *Observations*, 96; and Collins, *Practical Rules*, 170. For more information about colonialist perceptions of slave women's maternal affection, see my article 'The Agonies of a Negress', which deals with slave women's responses to the death of their children. A future article will provide a detailed analysis of colonialist and abolitionist views on slave women's maternal affection, extending it beyond the period of nursing.

<sup>12</sup> Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 131.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 123.

By the mid-1820s most of the proposals to indulge nursing mothers were adopted by Jamaican planters. They gave nursing women a lighter workload by transferring them to the second gang, reduced their working hours, provided them with extra allowances of flour and sugar and sometimes also increased their clothing allowances.<sup>14</sup> As to the nursing arrangements, very few planters adopted the nursery scheme. Their dislike stemmed from the fact that it: required a substantial investment; depended upon artificial feeding; was a factor of instability as the women had to leave the estate; and led to a reduction in the women's productivity as they lost time journeying to and from the nursery. Most planters adopted an arrangement that kept mothers and children close together. They either employed an elderly slave woman to look after the children in the field or allowed half of the nursing mothers to look after the infants while the other half was at work, alternating regularly.<sup>15</sup> Like the changes in childbirth practices, these were also used to deny abolitionist accusations of inhumane treatment of the slaves. Colonialists presented accounts of the nursing period, especially in the early 1830s, which argued that planters allowed nursing mothers to meet not only the first attribute of the metropolitan norm of motherhood - looking after the infants' physical needs - but also the second - ensuring their emotional contentment. For example, former resident James Kelly mentioned in his *Voyage to Jamaica and Seventeen Years Residence in that Island* that nursing mothers

on coming into the field, gave the children to a nurse, in some shaded corner or interval, where they were seated on the ground, or tumbling in infant play on the carpet. The moment any one began to cry, the old woman would call to the

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, McQueen, *The West India Colonies*, 257-60; Roughly, *Planter's Guide*, 105; and Barclay, *Practical View*, 318. The customary allowance of clothing for a field woman consisted of a jacket, petticoat and a hat made of Osnaburgh, a coarse kind of linen. Domestic slaves were given more clothes, which were usually made of a finer material. See, Higman, *Slave Populations*, 257.

<sup>15</sup> Kelly, *Voyage to Jamaica*, 34; De La Beche, *Notes on Condition*, 5; and Barclay, *Practical View*, 318

mother, who was never prevented, by the worst of the drivers, from going to suckle the infant.<sup>16</sup>

The proposals to improve the condition of nursing mothers were often accompanied by calls not to indulge the women too much. It was argued that large amounts of food and few labour demands made slave women breastfeed for a period of up to three years and hence reduced their fertility.<sup>17</sup> Natural increase, however, was not the only reason why colonialists favoured a shorter nursing period. They also preferred early weaning because it enabled planters to use the full productivity potential of the women and led to more stability on the estates. Dr. Collins mentioned, for instance, that the long lactation period led to the loss of 'some of the mothers' labour', while Thomas Roughly argued that it made the child 'accustomed to too much tenderness', so that it became 'unsuitable to its station'.<sup>18</sup>

To encourage early weaning, it was not only suggested that planters set up weaning houses, that is nurseries under the supervision of an elderly slave woman, but also that they reward mothers who brought their children to the house between the age of fourteen and sixteen months.<sup>19</sup> While most colonialists proposed a monetary reward, a few suggested a material reward in the form of a brief continuation of the indulgences. According to Dr. Collins, the latter had the advantage of making mothers more 'anxious' to preserve their children after they were weaned, as they would no longer consider them an 'encumbrance'.<sup>20</sup> One of the mother images, then, that sustained the proposals to reduce the nursing period was that of the selfish and indifferent mother. They were also

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<sup>16</sup> Kelly, *Voyage to Jamaica*, 33-34. For similar mother images, see Francklyn, *Observations*, 37; *Edinburgh Review and the West Indies*, 141; Barclay, *Practical View*, 318; De La Beche, *Notes on Condition*, 10; and McQueen, *The West India Colonies*, 257-58.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, [Grainger], *Essay on Diseases*, 17; Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 122; Collins, *Practical Rules*, 170; and Roughly, *Planter's Guide*, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Collins, *Practical Rules*, 170; and Roughly, *Planter's Guide*, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Only a few colonialists proposed an earlier weaning period. Dr. William Sells, for instance, suggested nine months as the appropriate time for weaning. *Remarks on the Condition*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Collins, *Practical Rules*, 170.

supported by the more positive image of the ignorant mother. Several colonialists argued that slave women practised late weaning because of their 'false' idea that it would improve their infant's well being.<sup>21</sup> They were of the opinion that it achieved the opposite effect. Thomas Roughly, for instance, mentioned that it reduced the quality and quantity of the mother's milk and as such made the infants prone to disease.<sup>22</sup> Planter Gilbert Mathison articulated even more directly that slave women were ignorant mothers, when he stated that the weaning house was a 'check upon ignorant and neglectful parents.'<sup>23</sup>

Evidence suggests that after 1800 most of the larger plantations established weaning houses and offered nursing mothers a monetary reward for sending their children at an early age. Planter Baillie, for instance, gave his slave women two dollars if they sent their child to the weaning house at the age of twelve months.<sup>24</sup> One possible reason why planters were less draconian than they might have been in enforcing shortened lactation periods is that they were aware of the theory circulating in the metropolitan society at the time that early weaning was associated with high infant mortality.<sup>25</sup> Another is that they seem to have realised that late weaning - like the delivery in their own hut by the midwife - was so important for slave women that forced changes in this practice would lead to more instability than the practice itself. Monk Lewis' policy to persuade his slave women to send their children to the weaning house when they were fifteen months by continuing their indulgences for another two months seems to have been inspired by a fear of instability. Shortly before he set up his weaning house, several slave mothers from a neighbouring estate had complained to him that they

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 168; [Tobin], *Cursory Remarks*, 80; and Roughly, *Planter's Guide*, 118. Recent research has shown that in the absence of adverse influences late weaning can improve both the infant's and the mother's wellbeing. See Bush, 'Hard Labour', 203

<sup>22</sup> Roughly, *Planter's Guide*, 118.

<sup>23</sup> Mathison, *Notices*, 92.

<sup>24</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 354.

had been forced to wean their children earlier.<sup>26</sup> Lewis tried to convince his readers that his method of subtle influence was a far more successful method to shorten the nursing period than his neighbour's coercive policy. He mentioned that when he opened the weaning house 'all who had children of that age immediately gave them up [while] the rest promised to do so, when they should be old enough.'<sup>27</sup> Following chapters will show that many absentee planters resorted like Lewis to this strategy of comparing their slave management policies to those of resident planters in order to construct themselves as 'a man of feeling', that is a man who felt compassion for the suffering of others. These planters clearly responded to the discourse in the metropolitan society that identified compassion and a reluctance to inflict pain as a civilised emotion and labelled cruelty as savage or barbarous.<sup>28</sup> Following chapters will also demonstrate that not only non-resident colonialists but all participants in the debates about Jamaican slave women were as much concerned with constructing their own identities as with defining those of slave women.<sup>29</sup>

During the Apprenticeship System, the attempts to encourage early weaning were continued and on some estates even reinforced, while the indulgences for nursing mothers were discontinued. Nursing women were no longer allowed extra time in the morning and evening, had to do the same work as the other women and were given far less time to breastfeed. In addition, they often had to work with their infants on

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Metropolitan child rearing literature strongly warned against weaning before the children had all their teeth. See Shorter, *Making of Family*, 181.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 331-32.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>28</sup> For more information on the emergence of the 'man of feeling' in eighteenth-century England and the metropolitan discourse about cruelty, see Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, chap. 2; and K. Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', *American Historical Review* 100, 2 (1995), 303-35.

<sup>29</sup> The more recent historical studies on representations of marginalised groups concentrate less upon the objects of representation and more upon those who did the representing. They are concerned to show that the latter constituted their own subjectivity in the process of defining the other. An example of this work is C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), which examines, among others, the construction of Englishness in the writings of Baptist missionaries in Jamaica in the 1830s and 1840s.

their back because planters withdrew the field nurses who were re-deployed to the field gangs.<sup>30</sup> The condition of nursing mothers also deteriorated in that planters withdrew the customary supply of food, clothes and medical care for the infants and forced them to pay back time lost in nursing and attending sick children.<sup>31</sup> Abolitionists argued that the first change had caused an increase in infant mortality.<sup>32</sup> Colonialists agreed that many infants had died from want of food and medicine since August 1834. However, they did not hold the planters responsible for this increase but the mothers themselves. They pointed out that planters had devised the most generous offers to provide food and other allowances but that the women had stubbornly refused to accept them. The 'colonialist' S.M. Fyfe, for instance, informed governor Sligo in August 1835 that on the Cambridge estate many young children had died 'from the want of medicine and medical attendance [because] the mothers having refused to give their four and a half hours to procure them.'<sup>33</sup> Although a prominent image, the troublesome mother was not the only mother image that colonialists invoked in their responses to the abolitionist accusation. Their proposals to make the planters' practice of 'extra labour for extra indulgences' a legal practice (that is, to add a clause to the Jamaica Abolition Act stating that nursing women had to work extra hours to obtain their former allowances) were supported by images of indifferent mothers.<sup>34</sup> The 'colonialist' S.M. Cocking, for instance, informed governor Sligo in December 1836 that

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<sup>30</sup> Statements of female apprentices in *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 152-269 and Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 383-425.

<sup>31</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 115, 369 and 406; and *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 214, 252 and 267.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, S.M. Dillon in *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 69. There is no statistical data on infant mortality during the Apprenticeship System.

<sup>33</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 115. For similar remarks, see *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 369 and 406; and *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 214, 252 and 267.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, S.M. Fyfe's proposal in *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 115.

so everything unlike *maternal feeling* [emphasis mine] do they display in many instances to their offspring, that humanity revolt at their barbarity; many of their children, when ill, are allowed to consume away from disease, etc. in the negro houses, and are sometimes at the last stage of existence before they will bring them to their managers or carry them to the hospital, where medicine and other necessities would be administered; and although they are repeatedly requested to bring them up when taken sick, many of them expire from the delay of the mothers before any assistance can be rendered.<sup>35</sup>

The proposed change in the Jamaica Abolition Act was thus clearly presented as an act of humanity. For most colonialists, however, it was to serve as a means to regain some of the power lost under the Abolition Act and to guarantee the future of the estates. As to the latter, it was hoped that the amendment would go some way towards transforming the former slave women into free wage labourers. It had to teach them an important lesson in free labour; namely, that luxuries could only be obtained by additional effort.<sup>36</sup>

The issue of paying back time lost in nursing and looking after sick children caused as much confusion among S.M.s as the issue of repaying time lost in labour. They were especially concerned about planters' claims for the payment of time lost in caring for a sick infant. Sligo recommended in October 1835 that they should recognise such claims. He supported his conclusion with the image of a selfish and idle mother:

With their proverbial readiness to make all sorts of excuses, I feel assured that if this [the sickness of their children] was allowed to be one, there would hardly be an occasion on which it would not be made, for the purpose of evading the just proportion of labour which it is their duty to give the master.<sup>37</sup>

This quote shows that Sligo's recommendation was not only inspired by his desire to appease the planters but also by his conviction that the Apprenticeship System had to

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<sup>35</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 252. The 'colonialist' S.M.s described the nursing mother as indifferent not only because she was unwilling to provide medical care for her children but also because she left them unattended in her hut when she went to work. See, for instance, *PP* 1835, vol. L, 150 and *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 252, 268, 272 and 282.

<sup>36</sup> Colonialists argued that it was mistaken kindness to allow apprentices benefits that were not given to labourers in other societies. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 176 and T. C Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain 1832-1938* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xxii.



provide lessons in free wage labour. Repaying time lost in carrying out maternal duties would, in his opinion, teach the former slave women about the contract notion on which the free economy was based; that is, the contract stipulating the rights and duties of employer and employee.<sup>38</sup>

Lord Glenelg disapproved of Sligo's recommendation. He suggested that when faced with a claim for repayment, S.M.s should carefully examine the nature of the illness and the time spent by the mother in looking after her child. Only in case it was proven that the mother had used her child's illness as an 'excuse for indolence' should she be forced to repay time.<sup>39</sup> Glenelg justified his decision by stating that

no act of Parliament could ever be meant to confer on any man the power of visiting by a penal infliction a mother who had neglected her duties to him, in order to afford to her child the aid and solace which in a state of disease it might require at her hands.<sup>40</sup>

Glenelg's recommendation was eventually adopted as the guideline for S.M.s. In 1837 he ordered Sligo's successor Lionel Smith to send a circular to S.Ms

to remind them that they have to resist every demand upon the services of the mothers which shall have the effect of depriving them of the time or the opportunities requisite for the discharge of their necessary maternal duties.<sup>41</sup>

The different recommendations put forward by Sligo and Glenelg suggest that they had different ideas about the role of black women in the future free society. While the latter

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<sup>37</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 138.

<sup>38</sup> For more information on Sligo's attempts to appease the planters and his interpretation of the Abolition Act, see Burn, *Emancipation*, chap. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 139.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 328. This circular was partly the result of the question put forward to governor Smith in October 1836 by the S.M.s Ramsay, Hill and Higgings about what to do when faced with what they considered 'one of the most distressing controversies between the servant and the master.' See *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 234.

saw their role as that of full-time mothers, the former suggested that at least for some time they were to combine motherhood with paid work.

**'The Most Essential and Most Important of All the Maternal Duties'<sup>42</sup>**

Throughout the period 1780-1838 abolitionists argued that Jamaican planters did not provide nursing mothers with sufficient time and means to ensure the health of their infants and develop a strong bond with them. During the campaign to end the slave trade, remarks about nursing practices served above all to convince the readers of the sheer barbarity and excessive cruelty of slavery. Abolitionists told them that slave mothers either worked with their children on their backs or left them on their own by the side of the field. Such nursing arrangements did, in their opinion, little to guarantee the infants' health and safety. Thomas Clarkson, one of the most active propagandists of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, stated this clearly in his detailed investigation of the slave trade entitled *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (1788):

It is usual for them too, before they are weaned, to accompany their mothers to the field, who tie them behind their backs, and carry them through the labour of the day or leave them in a sorrow. Thus exposed to a vertical sun, and afterwards

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<sup>42</sup> *A Dialogue between a Well-Wisher and a Friend to the Slaves in the British Colonies by a Lady* (n.p., n.d), 3. Clare Midgley has examined a large number of writings by female abolitionists in her book *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992). Most of them were, like this pamphlet, published anonymously so as to benefit feminine modesty. Like their male counterparts, female abolitionist writers focused on the sufferings of female slaves and the violation of family life under slavery. They also represented slave women first and foremost as innocent and passive victims in need of male protection. They differed from their male counterparts in that they presented their views far more in imaginative literature than in critical analyses of the workings of slavery. Moira Ferguson's study *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (London: Routledge, 1992) describes the development of these fictive accounts and points out their main themes and rhetorical strategies.

the dew of the evening, or the very heavy rain, and having received hitherto but a slender and unwholesome support from breasts of their overheated mothers, many of them are taken off.<sup>43</sup>

Such remarks also had to convince Jamaican planters that abolition of the slave trade would be advantageous. It was argued that improvements in the existing nursing arrangements would lead to natural increase and endear the planters to the nursing women. Proposals to ameliorate the condition of nursing women were similar to but went much further than those presented by the colonialists. For example, James Ramsay, a former Anglican missionary who played an important role in the early abolitionist movement, suggested like Dr. Collins that planters set up nurseries. He added, however, that nursing women should be kept at work near the nursery for the first six months and that from then onwards they should only be employed in light fieldwork.<sup>44</sup> These measures alongside the provision of more nourishing food for nursing women would, in his opinion, guarantee that the nutritional needs of the infants were sufficiently met. As to weaning, Ramsay suggested that mothers who decided to wean their children should be given 'a complete suit of clothes'.<sup>45</sup> The fact that he did not specify an age at which slave children should be weaned, suggests that his reward scheme did not aim to shorten the lactation period but simply to ensure that the mothers took better care of their infants during the nursing period. Thus like the colonialists, early abolitionists concentrated primarily on the first attribute of the metropolitan norm of motherhood - looking after the infants' physical needs - and invoked images of indifferent mothers. They, however, did not attribute slave women's lack of interest in their infants' well being to their nature but to the system of slavery. Dr. Jackson, who had worked in the island in the 1770s,

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<sup>43</sup> T. Clarkson, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade in Two Parts* (London, 1788), 91-92. This was one of the most popular pamphlets on the slave trade. It sold 15,000 copies in the first fifteen months. See Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 138.

<sup>44</sup> Rev. J. Ramsay, *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (Dublin, 1784), 77n.

replied to the Slave Trade Committee's question whether slave mothers were 'deficient in parental affection':

I should not suppose that they are naturally so, but hard usage, and the idea of raising children to be subjected to cruel treatment, often renders them indifferent or even given them the desire that their offspring may fail.<sup>46</sup>

Early abolitionists, then, were convinced that nature had endowed slave women with the same kind of maternal affection as English women but that the institution of slavery had lessened it.

Abolitionist remarks about nursing practices not only increased but also changed during the campaign for emancipation, which began in 1823. Far more emphasis was placed on the second attribute of the metropolitan norm of motherhood - ensuring the infant's emotional contentment - and the image of the naturally affectionate mother replaced that of the indifferent mother.<sup>47</sup> The purpose of the remarks also changed. They no longer aimed to appease the planters but to question their supposed civilisation. Abolitionists denied the colonialist contention that planters had significantly ameliorated the condition of nursing mothers. For example, *A General History of Negro Slavery* (1826) informed its readers that nursing women were 'compelled to perform the same labour the hoe and matlock as the men.'<sup>48</sup> They most strongly denied the claim that nursing arrangements had been adopted that ensured the infants' physical and emotional well being. They agreed that a new nursing arrangement - a nurse who looked after the children while the mothers were at work in the field - had become commonplace. They argued, however, that it did little to guarantee the infants' health and safety and develop

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 58.

<sup>47</sup> After 1823 abolitionists seldom argued that slave women's maternal affection was deficient. Especially through accounts of slave mothers' responses to the separation from their children, did they argue that slave women's maternal affection mirrored that of white women. See, for example, Rev. R. Bickell, *The West Indies as They Are; or a Real Picture of Slavery: But More Particularly as It Exists in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1825), 17.

a strong mother-and-child bond because the nurse was too old and infirm to take sufficiently care of the infants and the mothers were not allowed enough time to nurse.<sup>49</sup> Criticisms of the new nursing arrangement caricatured the slave mother as a suffering victim. For example, *A Dialogue between a Well-Wisher and a Friend to the Slaves in the British Colonies* mentioned that

[nursing] performed at any other time than the prescribed hours of the overseer, is an offence punished by the cruel stripes on the bare body of the unhappy mother . . . were you in the situation of a black slave, you must be content to leave your babe with many others under the care of some old negro, . . . you must let it (even though sickly) cry on in vain for the nourishment you would so gladly bestow on it.<sup>50</sup>

They also presented her as naturally affectionate; the conditions under which she was forced to nurse did not prevent her from trying her utmost to ensure her infant's contentment. *A General History of Negro Slavery*, for example, referred to her as an 'anxious mother'.<sup>51</sup> This image, which had to convince the readers of the full humanity of slave women, was also used to support proposals to enable slave women to nurse properly.<sup>52</sup> By 1823, abolitionists no longer proposed ameliorative measures but a complete exemption from work during the childbearing years.<sup>53</sup> In 1824 they presented the government with a plan for gradual emancipation, which suggested that the 300,000 female slaves under 45 years of age in the British colonies should be

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<sup>48</sup> *A General History of Negro Slavery: Collected from the Most Respectable Evidence and Unquestionable Authorities* (Cambridge, 1826), 76.

<sup>49</sup> *General History*, 76; *Plan for Effecting Emancipation by the Redemption of Female Slaves Laid before Government in 1824* (n.p., 1824), 5; *Dialogue between a Well-Wisher*, 3-4; *The Negro's Memorial* (London, 1825), 60; and [Rev. Trew], *Nine Letters to his Grace the Duke of Wellington on Colonial Slavery* (London, 1830), 54.

<sup>50</sup> *Dialogue between a Well-Wisher*, 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> *General History*, 76.

<sup>52</sup> While most abolitionists located the slaves' humanity in their ability to reason, a small number, especially female abolitionists and former missionaries, located it in their capacity to feel. See J. Kitson, "'Bales of Living Anguish': Representations of Race and the Slave in Romantic Writing", *English Literary History* 67, 2 (2000), 525.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, *Plan for Effecting*; [Trew], *Nine Letters*, 54; and Rev. B. Godwin, *The Substance of a Course of Lectures on British Colonial Slavery Delivered at Bradford, York and Scarborough* (London, 1830), 157.

exempted from compulsory work in the field. It was argued that in twenty or thirty years' time 'few traces of slavery would remain' because the children born would be free and the women would use their time to obtain money to purchase their husbands' and sons' freedom.<sup>54</sup> The main aim behind the plan was to ensure that like 'women in civilised countries' slave women were to be principally engaged in 'such domestic duties as have for their object the care and comfort of husbands and children.'<sup>55</sup> To convince the government of the feasibility of this project, the authors pointed out that it would put the children 'in the power of mothers, to whose *maternal feelings* [emphasis mine] the matter may be safely intrusted [*sic*], to devote to their offspring as much time as may be requisite for rearing them.'<sup>56</sup>

Abolitionists presented very detailed descriptions of the deterioration that had taken place in the condition of nursing mothers after August 1834. For instance, A *Statement of Facts* (1837), narrating the condition of apprentices in St. Thomas-in-the-Vale between July and November 1836, mentioned that

mothers of families were denied time to attend to their children - those with young infants were allowed no nurse to take care of them while at work in the field - and were thus often compelled to work with their children strapped to their backs - and even when rain came down in torrents, they were obliged to remain in the field with their infants exposed to it.<sup>57</sup>

Though they concentrated mostly upon the withdrawal of the nurse, abolitionists also mentioned the discontinuation of the extra allowances of food and clothes, the lack of

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<sup>54</sup> *Plan for Effecting*, 7. This plan followed an earlier plan for gradual emancipation, which was rejected by the government in 1823: the emancipation of all children. Many abolitionists disliked the plan because it did not allow slave men to exercise their proper role as household head. See for instance, Godwin, *Lectures on British Colonial Slavery*, 157

<sup>55</sup> *Plan for Effecting*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. To win the support of the pro-slavery lobby, the authors mentioned how the plan would benefit the planters. They mentioned that they would be compensated for each woman withdrawn from the field and that the withdrawal would lead to natural increase and a reduction in costs. By 1825 proposals such as these were replaced by demands for immediate emancipation without compensation for the owner. See Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 422-23.

medical provision for free infants, and the repayment of time lost in nursing and attending sick children.<sup>58</sup> The descriptions had to lend support to their claim that the Apprenticeship System was worse than slavery and hence needed to be brought to a premature end. The Quakers Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey mentioned, for instance, that the treatment of nursing mothers 'is another feature of the Apprenticeship, by which it is unfavourably distinguished even from the worst aspect of slavery.'<sup>59</sup>

Various attempts were made to explain these drastic changes in nursing practices. Some abolitionists argued that it was a matter of economics. The changes had to cut the costs and increase output and thus keep the plantations operative. Former S.M. Robert Madden told the 1836 Select Committee on the Apprenticeship that the motive behind the withdrawal of the field nurse was 'to get an additional quantity of time from the negro.'<sup>60</sup> Many abolitionists, however, interpreted the changes in the condition of nursing mothers as the planters' spiteful reactions to the loss of their proprietary and arbitrary power. In his analysis of the Apprenticeship System entitled *Jamaica under the Apprenticeship System* (1838), former governor Sligo posed the question whether the withdrawal of the field nurses was 'for economy, or for some other reason' as the old nurses were incapable of hard work and nursing women could only do half the work of an ordinary field hand because they worked with their children on their back.<sup>61</sup> Former

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<sup>57</sup> *Statement of Facts, Illustrating the Administration of the Abolition Law, and the Sufferings of the Negro Apprentices, in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1837), 7-8.

<sup>58</sup> These changes feature prominently in Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies* and the reports of 'abolitionist' S.M.s.

<sup>59</sup> Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 335. The Apprenticeship was to last until August 1838 for non-field labourers and August 1840 for field labourers.

<sup>60</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 71.

<sup>61</sup> [P.H. Sligo], *Jamaica under the Apprenticeship System* (London, 1838), 91. See also his remark that the withdrawal of the nurses was 'for the purpose of annoyance' in *PP* 1835, vol. L, 116. This book shows that Sligo became more critical of the Apprenticeship System after his resignation as governor in the summer of 1836 and that he developed closer links with the abolitionist movement. By March 1838, he was firmly convinced that the System needed to be abolished immediately. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 351.

S.M. Dr. Palmer provided an explanation that combined economic and non-economic factors:

This woman was protected during slavery by the planters, for they found it *profitable* [emphasis mine] to do so, for she was rearing young labourers to perpetuate the system. But the planters now consider that the greater the number of children a woman has, the greater is the bar to *their rights* [emphasis mine] and that their interests are not to be superseded by any claims of humanity or the natural ties between a parent and child.<sup>62</sup>

Three suggestions were put forward to alleviate the condition of nursing women, save for the complete and immediate abolition of the Apprenticeship System. Several abolitionists suggested giving a statutory basis to the indulgences and allowances granted to nursing women since the 1780s. The Abolition Act stated that only indulgences and allowances that were prescribed by colonial laws were to be continued. As the indulgences for nursing mothers had never been given a legal basis, the Jamaica Abolition Act had turned them into voluntary indulgences.<sup>63</sup> The abolitionist lawyer John Jeremie advocated this suggestion most strongly in his *Observations on Jamaica Acts* (1836) which was produced in evidence at the 1836 Select Committee on the Apprenticeship. He argued that the customary indulgences and allowances were 'indispensable to render the lot of the nursing women tolerable' and pleaded that they be declared 'obligatory under the new system.'<sup>64</sup> To gain support from the planting class for such an amendment to the Jamaica Abolition Act, he argued that it would lead to greater stability on the estates - 'much mischief' had occurred as a result of their withdrawal -

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<sup>62</sup> Cited in *Horrors of the Negro Apprenticeship System in the British Colonies* (Glasgow, 1837). 17.

<sup>63</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 402. As early as August 1834 attempts were made to give the customary indulgences a statutory basis. The Attorney General sent a circular to S.M.s urging them to recognise the allowances as obligatory under the new system. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 175. Although most abolitionists disapproved of the withdrawal, not all were in favour of giving them a statutory basis. See, for instance, *Negro Apprenticeship*, 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



and safeguard the future of their economic enterprises as it would 'secure them to the negro in the future.'<sup>65</sup>

A second suggestion was to add clauses to the Jamaica Abolition Act which made it illegal for planters to claim repayment for time lost in carrying out maternal duties and forced them to provide for the free children (that is all those under the age of six). S.M. Richard Hill, who had investigated the social conditions in St. Domingue in the early 1830s on behalf of the Anti-Slavery Society, hinted at the first clause when he told abolitionist William Lloyd that 'planters should have no control over nursing mothers.'<sup>66</sup> The American abolitionists Thome and Kimball, who visited the island in 1837 to ascertain the workings of the Apprenticeship System, embedded their call for the second clause in a dramatic account of a mother who had unsuccessfully tried to obtain medical care for her sick infant:

The woman had no claim for the support of her child, on the man who was receiving the wages of her daily toil . . . while the law gives him power to rob the mother, it has no compulsion to make him support the child.<sup>67</sup>

Considering the make-up of the House of Assembly, it is not surprising that it refused to adopt these proposals.<sup>68</sup> As a result, some abolitionists concluded that it required imperial legislation to improve the condition of nursing mothers. In the summer of 1837 S.M. Ramsay put forward a proposal which resembled the one presented to

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 23. He suggested, in other words, that it would guarantee the planters a future supply of labourers.

<sup>66</sup> W. Lloyd, *Letters from the West Indies, during a Visit in the Autumn of 1836 and the Spring of 1837* (London, 1839), 227.

<sup>67</sup> J. A. Thome and J. H. Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six Months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes and Jamaica in the Year 1837* (New York, 1838), 105. This remark suggests, like Jeremie's, that abolitionists were convinced that the Apprenticeship System did not recognise the necessary relation between labour and reward; and hence, that colonialists were wrong to claim that the withdrawal of the indulgences would teach the women an important lesson in free labour. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 176.

<sup>68</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 402. During the Apprenticeship System, the Assembly consisted of 45 members. The majority was drawn from a narrow, prejudiced and provincial class. There were never more than

parliament in 1824. He told governor Smith that the 'only chance of raising the free black infants' was to release all women from their Apprenticeship in August 1838.<sup>69</sup> His suggestion fell on deaf ears, as there was still a firm belief in the necessity of continuing the Apprenticeship in the Colonial Office.<sup>70</sup> Thus as a result of the attitudes of the House of Assembly and the Colonial Office none of the suggestions was put into practice. The only means adopted to ameliorate the condition of nursing mothers was the earlier-mentioned instruction to S.M.s to spare nursing mothers by, for instance, not sending them to the workhouse.

Jeremie's proposal shows that one of the mother images that sustained the abolitionist critique of nursing conditions under the Apprenticeship System was that of the troublesome mother. The mother images that were most often resorted to, however, were those of the suffering victim and the capable mother. The former was the most dominant and served to arouse the readers' passion and encourage them to undertake action to end the Apprenticeship System. Dr. Palmer, for instance, told a large gathering in Birmingham in June 1837 that

when the mother goes to the field she is forced to work with the infant tied to her back, and she is not allowed to run and place her infant in shelter when rain sets in. If, in the course of the day, she gives offence to the overseer or field-keeper, or even the black driver, at the close of her labour, instead of retiring to her family, she can be immured in the dungeon, even though it has rained the whole day, and she and her infant are drenched to the skin.<sup>71</sup>

Various other abolitionists presented accounts of nursing mothers who tried to defy the deterioration of their status.<sup>72</sup> Most of the women, however, failed. Thome and Kimball,

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three coloured members and only a few large proprietors. For more information on the Assembly during the Apprenticeship System, see Burn, *Emancipation*, 152-55.

<sup>69</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 322.

<sup>70</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 330.

<sup>71</sup> *Horrors*, 18.

<sup>72</sup> See especially the appendix to Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, which contains summaries of conversations with Jamaican apprentices in 1837.

for instance, wrote about a nursing mother who had arrived an hour later in the field than the other slaves because she had taken care of her four children and was subsequently sentenced to the workhouse.<sup>73</sup> Such descriptions of unsuccessful resistance not only served to arouse the readers' sympathy but also to convince them of the women's full humanity. They depicted the women as naturally affectionate mothers whose first priority was to ensure their infants' survival.

The image of the capable mother can primarily be found in reports of 'abolitionist' S.M.s. These men often presented the nursing woman as a mother who coped extremely well with her increased burden. They especially expressed their admiration for the ways in which she succeeded to provide her free children with food, clothes and medicine. It was argued that the free children looked 'healthy', 'well-fed' and showed absolutely no signs of maternal neglect.<sup>74</sup> This mother image affirmed the change in the women's status from chattels to persons with legal rights and duties. While the images of the troublesome mother and the suffering victim emphasised the women's difference - they were not mothering properly - this one stressed their essential identity with English women, as is shown by the following extract from S.M. Dunn's report from June 1836:

The affection and care manifested by the women in attending to their 'pickaninnies' under the peculiar difficulties which they labour, are highly commendable in maternal solicitude; I believe they are not *surpassed by the women of any other country* [emphasis mine].<sup>75</sup>

Some S.M.s went even further. They not only praised the mothers for safeguarding their children's health and bestowing them with affection but also for actively refusing the

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<sup>73</sup> Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 253. 'Abolitionist' S.M.s were strongly in favour of the government's emancipation policy and were extremely critical of the ways in which the planting class obstructed the workings of the Apprenticeship System. The majority, however, did not agree with the abolitionists in England that the terms of the System were wrong and that it needed to be ended prematurely.

planters' offer to provide for their infants. S.M. Chamberlaine, for instance, wrote in April 1837 that 'difficult as it comes on the parents to support their children, they have, in few or no instances, acceded to the terms of the masters to assist them in consideration of a return in labour.'<sup>76</sup> Remarks such as these served above all to demonstrate that the abolitionist project of a free Jamaica would succeed. They not only suggested that the nursing women possessed a key attribute of citizenship - self-sufficiency - but also that they tried to safeguard their infants' freedom. It was argued that the women perceived the planters' offer as a 'plot . . . for making them apprentices, and through that process reducing them to slavery.'<sup>77</sup>

### Conclusions

Jamaican planters faced a considerable dilemma when they tried to bring about natural increase through changes in nursing and weaning practices. Ample indulgences and allowances would ensure the future of their economic enterprises as they not only stimulated slave women to give birth more often but also enhanced the survival rate of their infants. However, they would lead to a decline in immediate profit returns as they increased the costs and reduced output levels. Many planters were unwilling to compromise their short-term profits and adopted primarily changes in nursing and weaning practices that enabled them to extract as much labour as possible from the women, while keeping the costs low. These changes were rationalised with mother images similar to those used to justify the interventions in childbirth: the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>77</sup> Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation*, 102. For similar remarks, see *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 330; and *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 313.

troublesome mother; the ignorant mother; the selfish mother; and the indifferent mother. The latter was the dominant representation. It featured especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when it served to shift the blame for natural decrease from the planters to the women themselves, and during the Apprenticeship System when it tried to convince abolitionists and their supporters that freedom had been offered too soon. In the 1820s and early 1830s colonialists seldom invoked the image of the indifferent mother. Their concern in this period was not with interventions in nursing and weaning practices but with defending the institution of slavery against abolitionist attacks. This project required images of capable rather than deficient mothers; hence, the dominance in this period of the slave mother who easily succeeded in ensuring her infant's material and emotional needs.

The colonialists' mother images were not only multiple and changing but also contradictory. One can find, sometimes even within the work of one author, images of indifferent mothers alongside images of affectionate mothers. It was especially non-resident colonialists who provided the latter. They were also far less restrictive in the elements that they borrowed from the metropolitan norm of motherhood. Contrary to those residing in the island, they did not think that it was sufficient to increase the survival rate of the infants by allowing mothers more time to feed and providing them with greater allowances of food. They were also keen to see that nursing mothers were given time and means to ensure their infants' emotional contentment. These colonialists, then, attributed slave women with a much greater degree of humanity than resident colonialists.

Abolitionists drew upon a similar range of mother images as the colonialists. They also presented the nursing mother as a deficient mother. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was her lack of affection for her offspring that was seen as

deficient, while in the 1820s and 1830s her deficiency was seen to lie in the care that she bestowed on her infants. During the Apprenticeship System the image of the deficient mother continued to be used, but often alongside that of the capable mother. The latter was a mother whose affection for her offspring and care of her infants' physical needs was not inferior to that of women in the metropolitan society. That abolitionist mother images were as contradictory as those presented by the colonialists can be deduced from Sligo's remarks about the treatment of nursing mothers. He supported the planters' claim of payment for time lost in caring for a sick infant with the image of a selfish and idle mother, while the suffering but naturally affectionate mother underlay his critique of the withdrawal of the field nurse.<sup>78</sup>

The abolitionist project of transforming Jamaica into a civilised and free labour economy explains the coexistence of the deficient and the capable nursing mother in abolitionist discourse. To encourage their audience to undertake the action necessary for this project, such as signing petitions for protective legislation, abolitionists had to portray the nursing mother as a deficient mother, that is as lacking the means to bestow sufficient care and attention on her infants. The audience, however, would only undertake action if it were convinced that the project would succeed. The image of the capable mother worked towards this end. It showed that slave women had the ability to act as proper mothers. The project also explains why abolitionists focused far more on the second attribute of the metropolitan norm of motherhood - looking after the emotional development of the infants - than the first - ensuring the infants' physical survival. They regarded the development of a strong emotional bond between mother and child as an important precondition for the third attribute of motherhood - providing moral training -, which was to be the main focus of the mothers after emancipation. In

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<sup>78</sup> This chapter thus supports E. Ann Kaplan's thesis that 'mother representations in any one period are always contradictory, multiple, many-sided.' *Motherhood and Representation: the Mother in Popular*

other words, abolitionists offered slave women the same norm of motherhood as they offered women in their own society. In doing so, they bestowed humanity on the slave women. This was, however, a humanity that was at best potential. The numerous images of deficient mothers expressed most clearly the idea that slave women were not yet as human as their white, English counterparts.

The abolitionists' proposals to allow slave women to become better nurses show clearly that they envisioned the role of black women in the future free society to be that of full-time mothers and homemakers. The withdrawal of the indulgences and allowances for nursing women after August 1834 suggests that colonialists defined this role primarily as that of full-time (field) labourers. They only acknowledged black women's role as mothers when they thought it would yield them financial gain. The acknowledgement of black motherhood, however, failed to secure the future of the planters' economic enterprises as it went hand in hand with oppressive workloads and a severe punitive regime that had a profound impact on the women's capacity to bear and rear children.<sup>79</sup>

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*Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), 19.

<sup>79</sup> The birth rate only began to rise after 1838. See Sheridan, *Doctors and Slavery*, 340. Various factors prevented a rise in the birth rate prior to 1838: the labour demanded of pregnant and nursing women and the punishments inflicted on them; demographic changes - a larger proportion of creole slaves and adverse sex ratios -; slave women's resistance to the interventions in motherhood; and the smallness of the pecuniary rewards for successful births. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 355.

**PART II**  
**SLAVE WOMEN AS COMPANIONS**



## INTRODUCTION TO PART II

Colonialists realised that natural increase required more than material incentives to breed and an amelioration of the condition of pregnant and nursing slave women. Many believed that a church-sanctioned marriage or at least faithful cohabitation would raise the levels of fertility. From the 1780s onwards, proposals were put forward to encourage slaves to live in stable and monogamous unions. These were supported by vivid accounts of slave debauchery, which contended that decreases in the slave population should not be imputed to the planters' wanton and improper exercise of power. The focus in these accounts was on slave women's sexual practices. It was argued that their trade in sexual favours with slave men and white men not only made them contract diseases that made them infertile but also led them to abort their offspring as children restricted this profitable trade. In spite of this widely held view and the various proposals to contain what was regarded as a dangerous sexuality, such as offering slave women a reward upon marriage and flogging married slave women who had sex with white men, Jamaican planters did little to remedy the problem of slave women's sexuality and hence facilitate natural increase.

Chapter three attempts to explain this major contradiction between colonialist rhetoric and practice. Its main aim, however, is to compare colonialist and abolitionist representations of slave women's sexuality. Colonialist representations were predominantly produced in the late eighteenth century within the wider debate about natural decrease. The few that appeared in the 1820s and 1830s were responses to abolitionist accusations that the conditions of slavery affected the morality of slaves

and whites alike.<sup>1</sup> These representations demonstrate even more than the mother images that there was a jostle of power between resident and non-resident colonialists in the discourse of slavery. The former presented slave women as 'scheming Jezebels', that is as inherently promiscuous women. The latter also provided images of promiscuous slave women. They suggested, however, that slave women had the ability to live up to the metropolitan norm of female sexuality, which urged women to control their sexual feelings and express them only within the confines of marriage.

Abolitionist representations of slave women's sexuality show slightly more variation than their representations of slave mothers. Evangelical abolitionists and (former) missionaries presented images of promiscuous slave women in accounts of interslave relations that were similar to those presented by non-resident colonialists. The majority of the abolitionists, however, concentrated on interracial sexual relations and portrayed slave women not only as innocent victims of white men's sexual lust but also as naturally chaste. Contrary to the resident and non-resident colonialists, there was not a fierce struggle for power between them as they worked towards the same end and held similar assumptions about slave women's nature. Their concern about slave women's sexual purity stemmed from the role that they wanted slave women to play in their project of a free Jamaica. Slave women were to create a home for their family that would act as a source of social stability. It had to be a safe haven for the husband and a place in which the wife could exercise a morally uplifting effect on the family members. Abolitionists argued that slave women could only fulfil their role as 'moral regenerator' if their sexual nature conformed closely to that of middle-class women in the metropolitan society, that is devoid of any sexual desire. The best way to ensure slave women's chastity was, in their opinion, to offer slaves a marriage

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of black female sexuality played a minor role in colonialist discourse during the period of

that was similar to that in the metropolitan society, that is a stable, monogamous and co-resident union in which husband and wife exercised distinct but complementary roles.

Representations of slave women's sexuality were far less subject to change than representations of slave mothers. This, however, does not make them less complex. Their complexity lies mainly in their intersection of various categories of difference. Resident colonialists, for example, provided representations of slave women's sexuality that assigned a difference to slave women by invoking the categories race, gender and sexuality. The foregoing chapters have already indicated that they put slave women in a hierarchy based on their essential identity with white women. The most light-skinned slave women formed the top of this hierarchy, while black women occupied the bottom. Some of their representations of slave women's sexuality, however, denied this hierarchy. For example, they generally presented coloured slave women as more promiscuous than black slave women. But whether resident colonialists represented coloured slave women as less or as more promiscuous than black women, the result was the same. Their representations of slave women's sexuality led to a racialization of sexuality, that is the construction of white sexuality as the norm and black sexuality as dangerous and deviant, as well as a sexualisation of race, that is the construction of black people as highly sexual beings.<sup>2</sup>

Slave women's sexuality was closely linked to the issue of slave marriage. Chapter four analyses the ideas of the colonialists about the purpose of slave marriage and the role that slave women were to play within it, and chapter five those of the

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Apprenticeship. Chapter five will show that it was then used to deny the accusation that planters infringed upon their apprentices' conjugal rights.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter three has benefited from Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's article 'African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race', *Signs* 17, 2 (1992), 251-74. It sets out the ways in which race and sexuality interacted in slave societies and demonstrates the ways in which racialised

abolitionists. Chapter four shows clearly the inconsistent and paradoxical nature of the discourse of slavery. The colonialist debate about slave women's sexuality presented images which dehumanised slave women and informed plantation practices that treated them as non-humans. The latter included not only outright rape but also the practice that was common on several estates of locking the women up at night. The colonialist debate about slave marriage, however, acknowledged slave women's humanity. It did this by arguing that slave women were capable of entering this important social contract and by pushing for a change in the slave law that had to encourage slave women to marry. That it was not a full humanity that was acknowledged, can be deduced from the fact that the marriage that slave women were offered was only an abridged version of the earlier-mentioned metropolitan ideal.

Chapters four and five stand out from the foregoing in that their main concern is not just with representations of slave women. As we shall see, the debate about slave marriage required a greater emphasis on male representations. An analysis of ideas about slave marriage is essential, however, as it enlarges our understanding of the contemporaries' ideas about the proper place and rights of slave women. It shows us that both abolitionists and colonialists wanted slave women not only to be capable mothers but also dutiful wives. It furthermore demonstrates that both sides disagreed about the conditions under which slave women were to exercise these roles.

Since the 1970s the slave family has occupied a central role in studies on New World slavery. Demographic historians have described the variety of slave family life and have assessed its implications for fertility, while women's historians have provided valuable information about the contribution of slave women to family life and the difficulties faced by slave men and women in trying to maintain their families.

The historiography of Caribbean slavery does not differ in this respect from that of Antebellum slavery. It differs, however, in that it has paid little attention to Christian slave marriage.<sup>3</sup> American scholars have not only assessed the duration and seasonal pattern of church marriages but have also examined the marriage ceremony, the slaves' motives for marrying, the sanctions that were used to ensure that married couples remained faithful, and the planters' attitude towards the institution.<sup>4</sup> Thus far Caribbean scholars have not provided a quantitative analysis of church marriages. A few studies have suggested some motives why slaves opted for or against a church marriage and have pointed out that there were certain sanctions in place to guarantee that couples adhered to their marriage vows and that various colonial legislatures tried to encourage church marriage from the mid-1820s onwards.<sup>5</sup>

A lack of sources is one reason why Caribbean scholars have understudied Christian slave marriage. They lack, for instance, the numerous slave narratives that American scholars have used to describe marriage ceremonies and celebrations as well as the slaves' motives for marrying.<sup>6</sup> Another and perhaps more important reason is that relatively few Caribbean slaves married in church. In Jamaica, the Anglican Church held the monopoly over formal slave weddings until 1837. Between 1808 and

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during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

<sup>3</sup> The informal weddings that were performed within the slave community by slave leaders have equally been understudied.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, R. H. Steckel, 'Slave Marriage and the Family', *Journal of Family History* 5, 4 (1980), 406-21; E. West, 'Surviving Separation: Cross-Plantation Marriages and the Slave Trade in Antebellum South Carolina', *Journal of Family History* 24, 2 (1999), 212-31; L. E. Hudson, *To Have and to Hold: Slave Work and Family life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); and J. Cornelius, 'Slave Marriages in a Georgia Congregation', in O. Vernon, R. Burton and R. McMoeth, eds., *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum South Community Studies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 128-45.

<sup>5</sup> M. Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 83; Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 101-03; and M. Craton, 'Changing Patterns of Slave Families in the British West Indies', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10, 1 (1979), 31-36.

<sup>6</sup> Diaries and other writings by Nonconformist missionaries, however, contain information about these two aspects and also provide valuable statistical information about Christian slave marriage.

1822, they performed only 3,600 marriages.<sup>7</sup> The fact that these marriages were recognised as valid in law did not mean that the couples had the same rights, duties and privileges as their counterparts in the mother country. They lacked, for instance, the means to prevent the dissolution of their marriage by their owner.<sup>8</sup> Nonconformist missionaries performed far more marriages. Barry Higman has estimated, for instance, that the Moravians performed 189 marriages at three of their stations between 1827 and 1834.<sup>9</sup> Among the factors that explain the low formal marital rate are the requisites that a couple had to fulfil. They had to obtain written permission from the owner or his representative and until 1827 they also had to pay a small fee to the clergyman. In order to be married by a Nonconformist missionary, a slave couple only needed to show proof of having been baptised. Another is the fact that Anglican churches were primarily located in urban parishes and hence beyond the reach of the majority of the slave population.<sup>10</sup>

This part will demonstrate that although slave marriage was a minor institution, it was a highly contentious institution because it had connotations of freedom and equality. The term slave marriage refers to any church wedding, while formal marriage is used to denote a marriage performed by an Anglican clergyman that was recognised as legal. Chapter four shows that most colonialists strongly disapproved of slave marriage, especially the formal version, but that pressure from

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<sup>7</sup> *PP* 1823, vol. XVIII, 320-21. The only returns of formal marriages are for the period 1808-22 and 1834-35.

<sup>8</sup> It was not until the first piece of legislation regarding slave marriage was passed in December 1826 that marriages solemnized by Anglican clergymen were considered truly legal. Contemporary accounts suggest, however, that such marriages were commonly labelled as legal. See, for example, the statements of Dr. Harrisson and Dr. Jackson in *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82; and the 'Return of the Number of Marriages legally solemnized between Slaves' in *PP* 1823, vol. XVIII, 320-21.

<sup>9</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 370. This estimate is the only statistical information that has thus far been published on marriages performed by Nonconformist missionaries in the island. It is likely that Baptist church books will demonstrate a similar marital rate. Methodist church books, on the other hand, will show a lower rate as Methodists often encouraged their members to obtain a formal marriage.

<sup>10</sup> Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 16.

the government at home and abolitionists made them change their opinion in the mid-1820s and even adopt legislation to encourage slaves to have their unions sanctioned by an Anglican clergyman. During the Apprenticeship System, they again displayed a negative attitude towards the institution and adopted practices on their estates and proposed legislation that served not only to prevent an increase in formal marriages but also to deny married couples their conjugal rights. One of the aims of chapter four is to explain why colonialists were so sceptical about slave marriage.

The abolitionist debate about slave marriage was far less subject to change. Chapter five shows that throughout the period 1780-1838 abolitionists expressed the opinion that if married slave couples were given the same rights, duties and privileges as married couples in the metropolitan society, Jamaica would become a more moral and civilised society. During the period of slavery their debate was very contradictory. On the one hand, they criticised planters for not conforming the formal slave marriage to the metropolitan ideal, while on the other they put forward suggestions to increase the number of formal marriages, such as laws to prevent the separation of married couples. The debate became more coherent during the Apprenticeship System when emphasis was placed on proposals to legalise marriages performed by Nonconformist missionaries and to ensure that married apprentices were able to exercise all their conjugal rights and duties.

### CHAPTER 3

## DEVIANT AND DANGEROUS: ATTITUDES TO SLAVE WOMEN'S SEXUALITY

Slave women's sexuality has occupied a central role in studies on Caribbean slave women. Until the late 1980s, the focus was on slave women's experiences of sexual oppression. By concentrating upon interracial sexual relations, various scholars tried to dispel the myth that slave women indulged in promiscuous and casual unions. Since then attempts have been made to examine the meanings that contemporaries attached to slave women's sexuality.<sup>1</sup> Some work has been done on the image of the promiscuous slave woman in pro-slavery writings. It has been shown that this image was informed by early ideas about African women and European concepts of femininity and that it served to justify the economic exploitation of slave women and the creation of stable slave families. Considerably less research has been carried out into the abolitionist construction of slave women's sexual identity. It has been concluded that abolitionists mythologised slave women as 'fallen women' in order to justify their project of moralising slave women.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter tries to correct the imbalance in the historiography by examining both colonialist and abolitionist attitudes to slave women's sexuality. It will also add to existing studies by examining a wider range of sources produced in a later period, which indicate that there was more to the white contemporaries' debate about slave

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<sup>1</sup> A pioneering study on slave women's experiences of sexual oppression is Reddock, 'Women and Slavery'. More recent studies of Caribbean slave women have examined the experiences alongside representations of slave women's sexuality. See, for example, H. Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (London: Zen Books, 1989); Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*; and S. Dadzie, 'Searching for the Invisible Woman: Slavery and Resistance in Jamaica', *Race and Class* 32, 2 (1990), 21-38.

<sup>2</sup> See Beckles, 'Female Enslavement'; Bush, "'Sable Venus'"; and Shepherd, 'Gender and Representation'.



women's sexuality than the whore-virgin dichotomy.<sup>3</sup> The first section examines the colonialist debate about slave women's sexuality. It begins with an overview of the arguments that they used to construct the slave woman as a highly promiscuous being and the reasons that they gave for her sexually deviant behaviour. It proceeds to show that colonialists not only perceived slave women's sexuality as a danger to their project of natural increase but also to the stability and productivity of their estates and finishes with a summary of the proposals that they put forward to contain slave women's sexuality.

The abolitionist debate about slave women's sexuality constituted a major attack on the mores of white Jamaican society. The second section shows that two, at first sight rather contradictory, images of slave women supported this debate. The section begins with an analysis of the least prominent image, that of the promiscuous slave woman. The remainder is concerned with the image of the naturally chaste slave woman, which was embedded in accounts of forced interracial sex. It explains why abolitionists perceived the latter to be a problem and outlines the suggestions that they put forward to enable slave women to be chaste.

The third section compares colonialist and abolitionist representations of slave women's sexuality and explains the lack of interventions in slave women's sexual lives. It shows that that the representations drew upon more metropolitan discourses than those of sexuality and womanhood and that both sides were far more divided on this issue than on motherhood.

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<sup>3</sup> Studies on representations of slave women's sexuality have concentrated upon a small number of well-known pro-slavery tracts from the 1770s, such as E. Long, *A History of Jamaica* (London, 1774) and the diaries of the overseer Thomas Thistlewood which have been reprinted in D. Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

## **'Rat-Traps Who Have Two Husbands, and Make Love to the Buckras'<sup>4</sup>**

### *A Deviant Sexuality*

The cult of domesticity, which emerged in England in the late eighteenth century, was accompanied by the production of a norm of respectable sexual behaviour: permissible sex was confined to the married procreative couple. Extreme emphasis was placed on the sexual purity of women, as they were to guarantee the home as a haven and a source of social stability. Women were urged to control their sexual passion both before and after marriage. Gradually, chastity came to be seen as an inner quality rather than a discipline. It was argued that women did not have an innate sexual drive and that their sexual feelings were only evoked through love in marriage. By the early nineteenth century the ideal of the 'passionless woman' or the 'angel in the house' was firmly established. As a result, women who displayed sexual passion, such as prostitutes and adulteresses, were not only seen as unnatural but also as unfeminine.<sup>5</sup>

Colonialists used various arguments to construct slave women as a deviation from this ideal. First, they argued that slave women began sex at an early age. Secondly, they mentioned that they frequently changed partners. Thirdly, they expressed the opinion that the women preferred multiple partners. Planter and historian Bryan Edwards mentioned, for instance, in 1793 that slave women 'would

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<sup>4</sup> C. Williams, *A Tour Through the Island of Jamaica from the Western to the Eastern End in the Year 1823*, 2d ed. (London, 1827), 300. Slaves used the term Buckra to denote an attorney, overseer or book-keeper.

<sup>5</sup> Branca, *Women in Europe*, 96-98; L. Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 33-34; R. B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 23; Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 326-47 and 366-73; J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 44-46; and Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 27, 170 and 401-03.

consider it as the greatest exertion of tyranny, and the most cruel of all hardships to be compelled to confine themselves to a single connection with the other sex.<sup>6</sup> The argument, however, that lent most support to the construction of slave women as sexually subversive was that they took readily to the prostitution of their bodies. For instance, the main character in the novel *Marly* (1828) was surprised at the readiness with which slave women offered themselves or even their daughters to white estate officers:

He was incessantly importuned by the pickeniny mothers, to take a wife; and there was not an individual among them, who had not some one of their young female friends to recommend for that purpose. Such recommendations were perpetually sounded in his ears. "Why mass Marly, not take him one wife, like oder buckra? dere is him little Daphne, would make him one good wife - dere is him young Diana - dere is him little Venus" . . . In addition, to which much coquetry among the young damsels was displayed, and all their attractive qualities were shewn for the same end.<sup>7</sup>

Many colonialists attributed slave women's deviation from the metropolitan ideal of female sexuality to their nature. Some did this indirectly by arguing, for instance, that exposure to the teachings of Nonconformist missionaries had not improved slave women's sexual behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Others did it more directly, like Jesse Foot who referred to slave women's preference for multiple partners as a 'natural passion', and Bryan Edwards who was of the opinion that the women's sexual desire

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<sup>6</sup>B. Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (London, 1793), 1:80. These arguments can also be found in: Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 121; *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 72, 363; J. B. Moreton, *West India Customs and Manners*, new ed. (London, 1793), 159; *Marly: Or, a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (Glasgow, 1828), 133; De La Beche, *Notes on Condition*, 17; Barclay, *Practical View*, 98; and *PP* 1836, vol. XIII, 378. Recent demographic studies have concluded that very few slaves lived in polygamous unions after 1807. See, for example, Higman, *Slave Populations*, 364-73.

<sup>7</sup> *Marly*, 133. For similar remarks, see Moreton, *West India Customs*, 125; and *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 122, 65.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, [J. Stewart], *Account of Jamaica, and Its Inhabitants by a Gentleman Long Resident in the West Indies* (London, 1808), 276. When Stewart wrote this book, very few slaves were members of a missionary church. By 1804, for instance, the Moravians had only converted 938 slaves. Slave membership increased in the 1820s. In 1834 there were 44 mission stations with a total membership of 27,000 slaves. Evidence suggests that the majority of the members were female. See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 21.

was nothing but a 'mere animal desire.'<sup>9</sup> The majority of the colonialists who did not represent slave women as naturally promiscuous, attributed their lack of sexual purity to factors beyond the planters' control. Planter Robert Hibbert, for instance, blamed it on slave men. Their innate desire for multiple wives had, in his opinion, produced 'incontinence' in slave women.<sup>10</sup> Anthony Davis attributed it to the most prominent symbol of reform, abolition and humanitarianism in the island: the Nonconformist missionaries.<sup>11</sup> He mentioned in 1832 the case of a missionary in Spanish Town who had told the women in his congregation to raise money to build a chapel in New Zealand by 'the prostitution of their persons.'<sup>12</sup> His remark was part of a fervent attack on Methodist and Baptist missionaries who were seen as the instigators of the 1831-32 slave rebellion.<sup>13</sup> Only a few colonialists argued that the conditions of slavery - especially the white estate officers' practice of taking slave women as sexual partners - were responsible for slave women's promiscuity. Former book-keeper J. B. Moreton expressed this most directly in his guide to prospective book-keepers and overseers entitled *West India Customs and Manners* (1793):

I say if the most virtuous woman now in England had been tutored like blacks, a slave in like manner, she would be as lascivious and as common as any; and again, I say, if blacks were tutored from their infancy in England, they would be as virtuous as white women.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Foot, *Observations*, 96 and Edwards, *History Civil*, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Hibbert, *Hints to the Planter*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> It was especially after the Canning government had launched its scheme to ameliorate the condition of the slaves in May 1823 that the planting class came to represent Nonconformist missionaries as incarnate evil. See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, chap. 4.

<sup>12</sup> [Davis], *The West Indies*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> For information on the role of the missionaries in the rebellion and their persecution afterwards, see Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, chap. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Moreton, *West India Customs*, 160. For similar remarks, see McNeill, *Observations*, 41; and Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 118. Most estates employed two or three book-keepers. These young men had very little skill and experience. They were generally employed to supervise the slaves in the field and to oversee the manufacturing of sugar and rum in the boiling and distilling house. See Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 56-57.

Not surprisingly, only non-resident colonialists articulated remarks such as these. They were of the opinion that the amelioration of the slaves was the best means to defend the institution of slavery against abolitionist attacks.

The dominant image of slave women in the colonialist debate about slave women's sexuality was that of the immoral and evil temptress. This was embedded in accounts of interracial sexual relations. Moreton mentioned in his guide that coloured slave women (that is all slave women of mixed race) used every means 'to set themselves off to the best advantage, to make themselves pleasing and engaging companions for white men' but that shortly after receipt of money or gifts, they did everything possible to hurt them.<sup>15</sup> The popular slave song 'Me Know No Law, Me Know No Sin', which was quoted by Moreton, shows that the image of the evil temptress also applied to black slave women:

Alth'o a slave me is born and bred,  
my skin is black, not yellow:  
I often *sold* [emphasis mine] my maidenhead  
To many handsome fellow.<sup>16</sup>

The song was quoted in various colonialist writings throughout the period of slavery. Michael Scott mentioned the following version in one of the sketches of plantation life that he wrote for *Blackwood's Magazine* in the late 1820s:

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<sup>15</sup> Moreton, *West India Customs*, 125-30.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 154. Moreton inserted this song mainly to demonstrate the extent to which slave women's lives were at the command of white male Jamaicans. Especially the third and sixth stanza proved to him that the women's 'virtue and chastity, as well as [their, HA] lives and properties' were endangered by white men. The third stanza relates that the slave woman had been severely flogged by her 'fellow' for having given birth to a black child, while the sixth stanza describes the flogging that she received at the hands of her mistress upon the latter's discovery that she had produced a child by her master. Moreton followed this song with the remark that there should be 'some law to protect them from abuses so tyrannic, cruel and abominable.'

Young officer come home at night, him give me ring and kisses  
 nine months, one pickanniny white, him white almost like missis.  
 But missis fum my back wid switch, him say de shild for massa.<sup>17</sup>

His remark that 'I scarcely forgive myself for introducing it here to polite society' shows most clearly that the main purpose of 'Me Know No Law, Me Know No Sin' in colonialist tracts was to convince the readers of slave women's deviation from the metropolitan ideal of female sexuality.<sup>18</sup>

The short-term relations initiated by black and coloured slave women in order to obtain material favours and of which white men were the mere victims, were not the only interracial sexual relations mentioned in early colonialist writings. Many colonialists addressed relations that were initiated by white men, had the consent of the slave women and were relatively permanent. The slave woman in question was usually referred to as the 'housekeeper'.<sup>19</sup> Like the 'prostitute', she was presented as having an innate appetite for material, consumer goods. Moreton mentioned, for instance, that most slave women desired to become a housekeeper so that they could order the manager to 'pamper and indulge' them like a 'goddess'.<sup>20</sup> It was not this appetite, however, that was considered dangerous but the control she exercised over her white man. According to resident John Stewart, housekeeper relations not only

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<sup>17</sup> M. Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log* (London, 1836), 179. The sketches, which were based on Scott's residence in the island in the 1800s and 1810s, were published as a book in 1836. For more information on the sketches and the novel, see B. Lalla, *Defining Jamaica Fiction: Marronage and the Discourse of Survival* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 34-35. On the various versions of the song and its popularity, see J. D'Costa and B. Lalla, eds., *Voices in Exile: Jamaican Texts of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. In my paper 'More than Producers and Reproducers: Jamaican Slave Women's Song and Dance 1770-1830s' given at the Annual Caribbean Studies Conference in Birmingham in June 2000, I have argued that a different meaning was attached to this song within the slave community. It served primarily to warn slave women against sexual relations with white men.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Moreton, *West India Customs*, 77; McNeill, *Observations*, 41; Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 40; and [Stewart], *Account of Jamaica*, 200. Barbara Bush has argued that slave women who were mistresses of poorer white men were not 'evil temptresses' but women who used their relationship with these men to advance not only their own and their children's situation but also that of their fellow slaves. See "'Sable Venus'", 770-72.

<sup>20</sup> Moreton, *West India Customs*, 77.

threatened the social order in that they led to 'spurious offspring' but also because the housekeeper obtained 'complete ascendancy and sway' over white men.<sup>21</sup>

According to Lady Nugent, women who managed to become housekeepers were extremely proud of their achievement and were held in high esteem in the slave community:

She shewed me her three yellow children, and said, with some ostentation, she should soon have another. The marked attention of the other women, plainly proved her to be *the favourite Sultana* [emphasis mine] of this vulgar, ugly, Scotch Sultan, who is about fifty, clumsy, ill made and dirty.<sup>22</sup>

Several other (non-resident) colonialists also mentioned that attorneys and high ranking estate officers had more than one slave mistress. Like Lady Nugent, they strongly disapproved of such interracial relations because it deterred slaves from establishing monogamous and stable unions and hence prevented natural increase. Hector McNeill, who visited the island in the 1780s, blamed slave men's lack of chastity partly on the fact that they saw 'almost every description of white men, totally inattentive to what so materially tends to propagation, namely, an attachment to one woman.'<sup>23</sup>

The colonialist discussion on interracial sexual relations in the 1820s and 1830s concentrated far more on the housekeeper than the prostitute. Various colonialists presented the housekeeper relation as an accepted fact of Jamaican society that caused both blacks and whites little harm. Planter Alexander Barclay mentioned,

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<sup>21</sup>[Stewart], *Account of Jamaica*, 200. See also Moreton's remark that housekeepers 'are often intolerably insolent to subordinate white men.' *West India Customs*, 77.

<sup>22</sup>Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 40. The word 'sultana' suggests that this was a coloured slave woman. Most housekeepers were of mixed race. See Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World*, 148.

<sup>23</sup>McNeill, *Observations*, 41. See also Moreton, *West India Customs*, 160; and [Stewart], *Account of Jamaica*, 277.

for instance, that it did not trespass on 'the connubial rights' of the slaves.<sup>24</sup> Arguments such as these served to deny the abolitionist contention that all interracial sexual relations were based on force and that especially married slave women were the victims of white men's sexual lust. This contention was a severe attack on the manhood of white Jamaicans as it implied that they deviated from the metropolitan ideal of male sexuality. The latter defined men as the sole bearers of sexual drive, while urging them to control and ration their sexual energy and only discharge it through the legitimate avenue of marriage.<sup>25</sup>

Two other arguments were used to deny the abolitionist charge.<sup>26</sup> First, that slave women desired to become housekeepers because of the material favours and the status it provided them within the slave community.<sup>27</sup> Second, that housekeeper relations resembled the monogamous, stable relationships of middle-class men and women in the metropolitan society and were based on more than sexual passion. For instance, *Sketches and Recollections of the West Indies by a Resident* (1828) informed its readers that housekeepers were 'faithful and attached, and, in the hours of sickness, evidence all the kindness and affection of wives.'<sup>28</sup> Anthony Davis argued that many such loving attachments were formed during a period of sickness. After recovery, the estate officer would ask the woman who had 'saved' his life to live with him. To emphasise that love underpinned the housekeeper relations, he mentioned that most of the officers went through great difficulty to have their housekeeper accompany them to a new place of employment; they often had to pay a great sum to compensate a

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<sup>24</sup> Barclay, *Practical View*, 100. James McQueen expressed a similar view. See *The West India Colonies*, 230-33.

<sup>25</sup> Tosh, *Man's place*, 46; and Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 340-43. The cult of domesticity thus also desexualised men.

<sup>26</sup> Only a few colonialists expressed the opinion that there was no interracial sex. See, for instance, *Evidence upon Oath*, 83.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Lewis, *Journal of a West India proprietor*, 78; *Evidence upon Oath*, 37; and Barclay, *Practical View*, 91.

<sup>28</sup> *Sketches and Recollection of the West Indies by a Resident* (London, 1828), 231.



planter for the loss of his labour.<sup>29</sup> Some colonialists, then, argued that the sexuality of slave women and white male Jamaicans was not a deviant but a conforming sexuality.

The image of the socially accepted housekeeper coexisted with strong denunciations of interracial sexual relations. The Anglican Reverend G. W. Bridges, one of the leading Jamaican defenders of slavery, mentioned in 1826 that 'the degeneracy of the white inhabitants, has already bequeathed some of the largest proportion of coloured children, *the evil* [emphasis mine], if such it be, is hourly increasing.'<sup>30</sup> The denunciations of interracial sex in the 1820s and 1830s differed from those in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in that they not only addressed white estate officers but also slave women. Cynric Williams's 1827 travel account included a slave man's suggestion that white estate officers should bring 'white wife from England' as well as his advice to several slave women that they should 'marry black men rather than commit adultery with white ones.'<sup>31</sup> The idea that whites and blacks should only have sex with members of their own race was also articulated in the account of a slave girl who fiercely resisted an overseer's attempts to force her into a sexual relation in the novel *Marly*. Marly praised her not only for resisting but also for convincing her fellow bondswomen not to embark upon a relation with this white officer.<sup>32</sup>

The various appeals to slave women and white officers to refrain from interracial sex should be seen within the light of the relative growth of the free population in the island, which consisted largely of coloured people as coloured slaves, more often than blacks, were granted manumission or given freedom after

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<sup>29</sup> [Davis], *The West Indies*, 70.

<sup>30</sup> Rev. G. W. Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica* (London, 1826), 371.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, *Tour through the Island*, 56 and 310.

<sup>32</sup> *Marly*, 148.

their master's death either in recognition of paternity or special services.<sup>33</sup> In 1810 freedmen comprised 7.4 per cent of the total population in the island, rising to 10.6 in 1830. This increase was the result of new legislation, which made manumission cheaper and easier to obtain, and natural increase.<sup>34</sup> It was accompanied by an increase in the assertiveness of freedmen. From 1815 onwards, they held regular meetings in Kingston and petitioned the House of Assembly to extend their social and political rights. In 1816, for instance, they asked for representation as taxpayers in the House of Assembly. The assertiveness reached a climax in 1830 with the establishment of the first freedman newspaper *The Watchman* which soon became the major organ to attack the caste system in the island.<sup>35</sup>

Various colonialists argued that the threat that this demographic change posed to the whites' position of power in the island could only be averted by forcing the island's population to keep to its own race. Most meant by the latter simply a ban on white men's relationships with black or coloured women. Some colonialists, however, argued that none of the following castes or breeds that made up Jamaican society should be allowed to blend: white, quadroon (white and mustee), mustee (white and mulatto), mulatto (white and black), sambo (mulatto and black) and black.<sup>36</sup> This concern was most clearly expressed in the novel *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827).<sup>37</sup> It relates the story of a quadroon slave woman named Michal who tries to obtain the favours of Roland, a white missionary. The latter's object of desire is Joanna, the daughter of a planter and Michal's mistress. Another main character in the novel is Roland's assistant Sebastian, a free mulatto man who tries very hard to win his way to

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<sup>33</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 380-84.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 77 and 149.

<sup>35</sup> G. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Oxford: Clío Press, 1981), chaps. 2-3 and Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 424-26.

<sup>36</sup> Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society*, 167. This colour hierarchy characterised Jamaican society during the period of slavery.

Michal's heart. Especially the inset story of Sebastian's futile attempts to court Michal reveals the novel's message not to blur the colour line. Shortly after his first meeting with Michal, Sebastian realises that all his hopes to win her heart are in vain:

Quadroon damsels do not look for beauty in the youth of their own colour; their first ideas of *admiration or love* [emphasis mine] are devoted to the genuine white breed, either native or imported, to which they are themselves indebted, as they think, for the charms of their own persons, and all the favour they find in the eyes of those who sigh for their affections. Therefore, however, natural the desire she might have to appear to advantage, even before a young mulatto man, nothing was farther from her thought than to inspire him with anything like that confidence which prompted him, after he had tenderly squeezed the hand unconsciously held out to him, to imprint a kiss upon her lips.<sup>38</sup>

It is especially through a comparison with her mistress, that Michal's sexuality is presented as a deviation from the metropolitan ideal. Whereas Joanna does not even entertain Roland's advances, Michal actively tries to woo him, driven not by love but sheer ambition:

This young girl is in love with some white gentleman - for they always aspire: ambition goes hand in hand with love - ambition of distinction, of being above the pity at least of all their friends and rivals, if not of being an object of their envy.<sup>39</sup>

This negative image of Michal, however, coexists with very positive descriptions of her physical appearance, which *Westminster Review* described as 'not displeasing'.<sup>40</sup>

Her skin was nearly as white as that of any European, of a clear and animated hue, the roses glowing upon her cheeks – . . . and her forehead was shaded by some of the prettiest brown curls that ever graced the brows of a Quadroon damsel. . . . the long black eyelashes which like portcullises, guarded those portals of her heart, or mind, or genius, . . . had been designed by nature with

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<sup>37</sup> For more information on this anti-missionary tract, see Lalla, *Defining Jamaican Fiction*, 44-52.

<sup>38</sup> *Hamel, the Obeah Man*, 2 vols. (London, 1827), 1:77.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>40</sup> *Westminster Review*, April 1827, 460.

such attention to *symmetry* [emphasis mine], and to what we have learned from our ancestors to consider beautiful.<sup>41</sup>

Michal is here not only presented as physically similar to white women but is even eroticised. One could interpret this eroticisation as a means through which the author tried to give expression to his desire for coloured slave women, which by this time had largely become a forbidden desire. It is also possible to read the 'not displeasing' description of Michal as a method adopted by the author to convince his readers of the danger that quadroon slave women posed to white Jamaican society. They were so similar to white women that it was easy for them to pass as white and hence upset the delicate balance of power in Jamaican society that was based on distinct boundaries between racial groups. They also threatened the social order in that the offspring of their relations with white men added to the freedmen population. The Slave Law stipulated that children of slave mothers and free fathers inherited the status of their mothers unless they were more than four generations removed from black ancestors.<sup>42</sup>

It can be argued that the eroticisation undermined rather than enhanced the author's argument that coloured slave women, in particular quadroon women, were given over to unrestrained promiscuity and sexual excess. At the time, feminine beauty was linked to virtue. It was assumed that a woman's virtue was visible on her face. The eyes of a virtuous woman, for instance, were seen to be clear and transparent like water. A woman with irregular features, on the other hand, was believed to be capable of irregular conduct.<sup>43</sup> Many other colonialists accompanied their images of coloured slave women as evil temptresses with favourable descriptions of their physical appearance. They described their faces as 'soft', 'sweet',

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<sup>41</sup> Hamel, 195-96.

<sup>42</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 147.

<sup>43</sup> J. Fahnestock, 'The Heroine of Irregular Features: Physiognomy and Conventions of Heroine Description', *Victorian Studies* 24, 3 (1981), 325-50.

and 'fine' and their eyes as 'bright', 'brilliant' and 'sparkling', while they admired their teeth for their colour and regular shape.<sup>44</sup> In other words, coloured slave women possessed the transparent and regular faces associated in the metropolitan society with virtuous women. Thus again we see that colonialist discourse was a highly contradictory discourse.

Whereas coloured slave women in the novel compare unfavourably with white women, their representations are far more advantageous than those of black slave women. Not only does the author fail to mention the latter's physical appearance, he also seldom addresses them by their real names. The majority of the black slave women - which appear in the novel's description of Roland's attempts to stir some slaves up to rebellion - are primarily referred to in derogatory terms:

The missionary was no sooner left alone with the black dame than the latter asked him if he was hungry or thirsty, and offered him all she had to offer in the shape of refreshments. "Black woman", said he, "mistress Hamel, or by what other name shall I address you? Negress! sister in the spirit! . . . "Tell me mistress - mammy, I should say - are you the only wife of Hamel?"<sup>45</sup>

The author thus adopted a classification system whereby slave women were put in a hierarchy based on their essential identity with white women. The fact that he put quadroon slave women at the top in spite of their deviant sexuality shows that his classification was a mere nomination of the visible, such as skin colour and facial symmetry. The novelist was no exception in this respect; all classifications of slave women were based on visible signs and functions. Lady Nugent, for instance,

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, *Marly*, 180; Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 69; and Williams, *Tour through the Island*, 324. Remarks such as these contradict I. Grewal's argument that within late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century aesthetic discourses blackness was associated with 'opacity, fear and horror'. *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996), 27.

mentioned that black women bred faster, had healthier children and recovered sooner after lying-in than mulatto women.<sup>46</sup> Various historians have shown that a classification system also existed outside the realm of discourse. For instance, coloured slave women were most often allocated jobs in the house on the assumption that they were as incapable of physically demanding labour as white women, while black women were usually assigned to the field.<sup>47</sup> Both real and discursive classification performed a policing function: it assigned positions, regulated groups and enforced boundaries.

The novel *Hamel, the Obeah Man* suggests, then, that colonialists used specific discursive strategies to keep the racial boundaries and hence power relations intact. We must not lose sight, however, of the fact that throughout the period 1780-1838 interracial sex occupied only a marginal place in the colonialist debate about slave women's sexuality. The issue was also marginalised in practice. Evidence suggests that most planters turned a blind eye to the interracial sexual encounters of their white staff.<sup>48</sup> Monk Lewis, who was extremely critical of his slaves' preference for cross-plantation mating, did not display an aversion to the various housekeeper relations on his estate. He narrated, for instance, in a very matter-of-fact way that Psyche had left her husband Nicholas for one of his white employees.<sup>49</sup> Considering the planters' attitude it is not surprising that the House of Assembly did not, like some West Indian legislatures, pass acts that subjected white men to huge fines for having

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<sup>45</sup> *Hamel*, 83-88. The main story of the novel is the revolt planned by Roland, not out of concern for the slaves' humanity but to win the heart of Joanna.

<sup>46</sup> Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 94. For more on this rhetorical strategy, see D. Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*, 3d ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), chap. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Many historians have addressed the differential treatment of black and coloured slave women. For information on the employment patterns of coloured and black slave women, see Mair, *Women field Workers*, 170; and Higman, *Slave Populations*, 194-95.

<sup>48</sup> According to Higman, only planters in Barbados made consequent attempts to prohibit miscegenation on their estates. *Slave Populations*, 150.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 78.

sex with married slave women.<sup>50</sup> The only piece of legislation relating to interracial sex that was passed in Jamaica was clause XXXII of the 1826 Slave Law that introduced the death sentence for the rape of female slaves.<sup>51</sup> Its underlying aim, however, was not to prevent miscegenation but to please the abolitionists and the government at home.

In May 1823 as a result of abolitionist campaigning, the House of Commons adopted a set of resolutions to ameliorate the condition of the slaves in the West Indies, which stated the intention to abolish slavery at as early a date as was compatible with the welfare and safety of the colonies. It included among others the proposal to admit slave testimony in courts of law, a programme to encourage religious instruction and marriage, and a ban on female flogging.<sup>52</sup> In November 1823, the colonial governor, the Duke of Manchester, asked the Assembly to enact the government's reform proposals. The latter, however, saw them as a step towards immediate emancipation and declined to do so. It adopted clause XXXII as a symbolic token.<sup>53</sup> It had to convince the government that it was not unwilling to ameliorate the condition of the slaves and hence avoid future interference in their affairs, and also deny the abolitionist contention that planters were inhumane and uncivilised because they did not elevate slave women.

Various factors explain the lack of action to curb interracial sex. First, the white population in the island declined from 6.9 per cent of the total population in

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<sup>50</sup> The Leeward Islands introduced such a law in 1798. See Bush, 'Hard Labour', 199.

<sup>51</sup> *1826 Slave Law*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 104-05; and Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 422.

Various ameliorative proposals put forward by the abolitionists were rejected by the government, such as the plan to emancipate all children. The amelioration scheme, which did not include a proposal to prevent rape, was to be carried out in the Crown Colonies by an Order in Council and in the others by the local legislatures.

<sup>53</sup> *PP* 1824, vol. XXIV, 427 and 452. The House of Assembly defended its refusal by stating that the reform programme was an invasion of what was 'exclusively the province of the local legislature'.

1810 to 5.0 per cent in 1830.<sup>54</sup> This led to a decrease in white paternity, reflected in the decrease of the proportion of coloured slaves from 12 per cent of the total slave population in 1817 to 10 per cent in 1832.<sup>55</sup> It is likely therefore that planters did not perceive interracial sex as a major destabilising factor. Non-slaveholding residents were also not concerned about interracial sex. As children of mixed race inherited their mother's status, they were fed and clothed at the expenses of the planters and not the public. Secondly, there was a paucity of white women in the island. This implied not only that white men used slave women to satisfy their sexual needs but also that there was less of a social barrier against interracial sex.<sup>56</sup> Thirdly, there were advantages attached to interracial sex. It not only enabled the planters to increase their slave labour force without extra costs but also to ensure a supply of white labour. At a time when white estate officers were in short supply, a policy of allowing them sex with slave women could serve as a means to keep them on an estate. They also perceived it as an excellent means to control their slave labour force as it enlarged the divisions in the slave society. Fourthly, the restrictions of the colonial context. The fact that the majority of the estates were managed on a day-to-day basis not by married, resident planters but by unmarried overseers would have made it extremely difficult to implement a law fining white men for interracial sex. Finally, slave women were perceived as items of property. The planting class saw no need to criminalise interracial sex, as the object of white men's sexual lust was, in their opinion, not a proper human being.

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<sup>54</sup> Higman, *Slave Populations*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-48.

<sup>56</sup> Studies tracing the criminalisation of interracial sex in the Antebellum South have shown that this process was accompanied by an increase of white women. See, for instance, P. Finkelman, 'Crimes of Love, Misdemeanours of Passion: The Regulation of Race and Sex in the Colonial South', in C. Clinton



*A Dangerous Sexuality*

Whether they saw it as an innate condition or the result of the conditions of slavery, colonialists agreed that slave women's sexuality was a danger that needed to be controlled. It endangered first of all their project of natural increase. James Adair attributed natural decrease not only to slave women's lack of maternal affection but also to

the very early premature, and debilitating commerce of the sexes and the frequent attempts to procure abortions in the younger females, with a view of preserving their person longer in request, and thereby inducing sterility.<sup>57</sup>

His view was widely supported not only in the island but also in the mother country. For instance, the suggestions for natural increase that the Secretary of State, the Duke of Portland, put forward in 1798 were based on the assumption that the decrease was largely the result of slave women's tendency to prostitute themselves.<sup>58</sup>

It was furthermore seen as a threat to the stability and productivity of the estates. The foregoing has indicated that especially slave women's relations with white men were considered a destabilising factor. They increased the rate of miscegenation and as such facilitated an increase in the freedmen population. In addition, they reduced white men's control over the labour force as the gifts and the attention bestowed on the women made them forget their status as slaves. They also

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and M. Gillespie, eds., *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 124-38.

<sup>57</sup> Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 121.

<sup>58</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 122, 65. See also J. Foot, *A Defence of the Planters in the West Indies Compromised in Four Arguments* (London, 1792), 97; McNeill, *Observations*, 40; Edwards, *History Civil*, 143; the statements of Hibbert, Wedderburn, and Grander in *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 72; the statements of Stephen Fuller and John Quier in *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 69; De La Beche, *Notes on Condition*, 17-18; and Hibbert, *Hints to the Planter*, 12.

had an indirect impact on output levels as the offspring of such relations were employed around the house rather than in the field.<sup>59</sup>

Slave women's relations with slave men were seen as equally destabilising. It was first of all argued that the women's sexual practices caused jealousy among slave men. Moreton mentioned this in his verse 'Quashiba Returns', which relates 'the complaint of a negroe man whose helpmate had deserted him':

Then I thoughtlessly bid her prepare  
The herrings and green caliloo;  
I forgot, for a while, all my care;  
I forgot that she had not been true.

But when we deliciously dined,  
And were stretch'd in the tamarind shade,  
With anguish it came to my mind  
The price for the herrings she paid.

And my heart-strings were sent in twain,  
And my breast did with *jealousy burn* [emphasis mine];  
I bid the dear nymph to explain  
What she gave to Neptune in town.

"Dear Cufty she gently replies,  
come be neither furly [*sic*] or gruff"  
and wantonly rolling her eyes,  
she said, "I did give him a --"<sup>60</sup>

Monk Lewis provided an account to demonstrate that such jealousy could upset the stability of estates. A man whose wife had left him for a younger man took revenge, not only by physically abusing his wife but also by killing his rival. His act of revenge affected also the productivity of the estate as it lost two valuable workers: the dead man and the murderer, who was to be sentenced to either death, transportation or life

<sup>59</sup> See Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 118; McNeill, *Observations*, 42; and [Stewart], *Account of Jamaica*, 200.

<sup>60</sup> Moreton, *West India Customs*, 151. It is unclear whether Neptune was a white or black man. A preceding verse mentions that Quashiba had gone to town to see 'smarter beaumen than me'.

imprisonment.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, it was suggested that interslave relations often involved 'night-walking'. Slave women preferred sexual partners on other estates whom they visited during the weekend and also often during the week.<sup>62</sup> Their night-walking implied that for a considerable period of time they were beyond the control of the planter and his officers. Jesse Foot presented slave women's cross-plantation relations most clearly as a disrupting factor: 'His negroe women cohabiting with men of *others*, the master cannot in that case pursue the system his reason approves, by not having his own *Imperium in Imperio*.'<sup>63</sup> Most colonialists, however, perceived slave women's preference for partners on other estates as a threat to natural increase. James Adair mentioned, for example, that the women's night-walking made their children more prone to accidents as they were left unattended at home and made the women so tired that their milk 'vitiating' and their babies subsequently suffered from various, often mortal, diseases.<sup>64</sup> Remarks such as these served to justify interventions in slave motherhood. One of the characters in the novel *Marly* mentioned that

fit parents such persons would make to bring up a family, if no other person were to look after their children and see whether or not they were properly treated.<sup>65</sup>

Though none of the colonialists articulated it as such, slave women's night-walking also posed a threat to productivity; it fatigued them so much that they were unable to work at their full potential the next day.

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<sup>61</sup> Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 199. At the time when Lewis wrote his account, the man was awaiting trial in Montego Bay. The Slave Law stipulated these forms of punishment for murder.

<sup>62</sup> Most resident colonialists, however, argued that it was slave men who initiated cross-plantation relations and did the travelling at night. They disapproved of this practice, as the offspring did not add to the owner's labour force. See, for example, Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 142; and Foot, *Defence*, 96.

<sup>63</sup> Foot, *Defence*, 97. Original emphasis.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 97 and 15.

Proposals to contain slave women's sexuality covered the planters' economic and other interests by arguing that they enhanced the well-being of the slaves. Jesse Foot mentioned, for instance, that 'the comforts of negroes must be increased by the man cohabiting with the woman.'<sup>66</sup> Many colonialists agreed with Foot that this could only be achieved if planters discouraged polygamy and cross-plantation mating.<sup>67</sup> Few, however, specified how this should be done. James Simpson, who managed several absentee plantations, told the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery that Sheldon Estate had adopted a scheme to 'lock up and secure the female sex from all intercourse with the male sex at night.'<sup>68</sup> This scheme was based on and reinforced the idea that slave women were naturally promiscuous. More often articulated, however, was the suggestion to offer slaves a material or monetary reward upon marriage, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Underlying this proposal was the image of the potentially virtuous slave woman; she would remain sexually pure if she were given a generous compensation for the loss of her trade in sexual favours.

Several colonialists argued that slave women's sexuality could only be successfully contained if attempts to make them cohabit with one slave man were accompanied by measures to curtail interracial sex.<sup>69</sup> One measure proposed was the employment of married estate officers. It was by the late eighteenth century common policy to employ only single men as overseers and book-keepers. This was one way in which planters tried to reduce the costs of their estates as the employment of married

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<sup>65</sup> *Marly*, 99. At the time that the novel was published, cross-plantation relations had assumed vast proportions. Higman has estimated that about half of the slave mates belonged to different, often neighbouring, masters. *Slave Populations*, 369.

<sup>66</sup> Foot, *Defence*, 98.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 161; Renny, *History of Jamaica*, 185; and *Marly*, 98.

<sup>68</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 393. Manager William Taylor designed the plan.

<sup>69</sup> Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 118; McNeill, *Observations*, 41-42; Foot, *Observations*, 97; and Williams, *Tour through the Island*, 310.

men involved the building of houses and other facilities to accommodate wives and children.<sup>70</sup> Planter and historian Edward Long argued as early as 1774 that planters should encourage their estate officers to marry. He was of the opinion that this project could only be realised if white women in the island were rendered 'more agreeable companions, more frugal, trusty, and faithful friends, than can be met with among the African ladies.'<sup>71</sup> The image of the immoral and evil temptress that underlay Long's proposal also supported the suggestion to punish slave women who engaged in sex with white men. James Adair, for example, was especially keen to see that planters meted out severe punishments on married slave women who offered their sexual favours to white men.<sup>72</sup> Moreton's proposal to curb interracial sex was not supported by an image of slave women that emphasised their difference. He proposed a law to fine white men for having sex with slave women that would protect slave women's 'virtue and chastity.'<sup>73</sup>

### **'Naturally . . . Endowed with Moderate Passions'<sup>74</sup>**

Abolitionists also argued that slave women's sexuality deviated from the metropolitan ideal. They mentioned among others that the women engaged in premarital sex, prostituted themselves and especially in the 1820s and 1830s that they committed adultery. This argument was supported by two images of slave women. First, the naturally chaste slave woman. The pamphlet *Emancipation or Practical Advice to*

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<sup>70</sup> Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Long, *History*, 330.

<sup>72</sup> Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 161.

<sup>73</sup> Moreton, *West India Customs*, 155.

<sup>74</sup> T. S. Winn, *Emancipation or Practical Advice to British Slave Holders: With Suggestions for the General Improvement of West India Affairs* (London, 1824), 38.

*British Slaveholders* (1824) informed its readers, for instance, that slave women were by nature 'endowed with moderate passions.'<sup>75</sup> Second, the promiscuous slave woman. This image featured in the accounts of interslave relations presented by Evangelical abolitionists and (former) missionaries. William Wilberforce, for example, mentioned in 1823 that 'the prevalence of promiscuous intercourse between the male and female slaves is nearly universal.'<sup>76</sup> Arguments similar to those presented by the colonialists were used to demonstrate the promiscuity of slave women. Based on a three-year residence in the island, Rev. Thomas Cooper concluded that 'the women will say that they would not be such fools as to consent to one man.'<sup>77</sup> Evangelical abolitionists and missionaries, however, did not attribute slave women's deviant sexual behaviour to their nature but to the conditions of slavery. According to the pamphlet *Considerations on the Expediency of an Improved Mode of Treatment of Slaves in the West Indian Colonies* (1820):

When great corruptions prevail there [sexual behaviour], they may be referred rather to some peculiar state of society or some artificial cause than to any particular native bias ( I speak especially of females) or tendency.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> W. Wilberforce, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London, 1823) as reprinted in D. Lee, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period* (London: Pickering and Cato, 1999), vol. 3, *The Emancipation Debate*, 22. Further references are to this version. Evangelical abolitionists, such as Hannah More, Zachary Macaulay and James Stephen, were members of the Church of England who believed in a reform from within the Church. They played especially a prominent role in the campaign to abolish the slave trade. Methodist and Baptist missionaries not only supplied the abolitionists with important information but also took an active part in the campaign for emancipation. For more information on both groups of abolitionists, see Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, chaps. 3 and 9.

<sup>77</sup> T. Cooper, *Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica* (London, 1824), 9. Cooper, who lived on Robert Hibbert's estate from 1817 till 1820, also mentioned that women prostituted themselves. For similar remarks, see Rev. Hope Masterston Waddell, *Twenty-nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure 1829-1858*, 2d ed. (London, 1970), 40; the statement of Rev. John Barry in *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 70; and J. M. Phillippo, *Jamaica: Its Past and Present State* (London, 1843), 218.

<sup>78</sup> *Considerations on the Expediency of an Improved Mode of Treatment of Slaves in the West Indian Colonies* (n.p., 1820), 10.

They argued, like some colonialists, that it was slave men's desire for multiple partners that caused slave women to behave promiscuously.<sup>79</sup> This desire was seen as an acquired rather than an innate condition. It stemmed first of all from the bad example that the planters and their white employees set to slave men. The Methodist missionary John Barry, for instance, told the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery that polygamy was the result of 'the master's indiscriminate intercourse with his servants.'<sup>80</sup> It was also seen as the result of the planters' attitude to slave marriage. During the campaign to abolish the slave trade, Evangelical abolitionists and missionaries argued that planters did nothing to encourage marriage and allowed 'a slave man to have what wives he pleaseth.'<sup>81</sup> In the 1820s and early 1830s, they expressed the idea that polygamy was facilitated by the absence of a proper legal marriage; that is, a marriage that gave slaves the same rights and duties as married couples in the metropolitan society.<sup>82</sup> Rev. Thomas Cooper, for instance, informed his readers that slave men were 'compelled to form the loosest and most disgusting connections' because they could not marry.<sup>83</sup>

Thus although Evangelical abolitionists and missionaries presented slave women's sexuality in their accounts of interslave relations as a deviation from the metropolitan ideal, they did not doubt slave women's ability to be virtuous wives. This idea was far more convincingly expressed in the numerous accounts of interracial

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 71. See also the statement of Rev. Peter Duncan in *ibid.*, 112 and Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 9.

<sup>81</sup> Ramsay, *Essay on the Conversion*, 243. During the campaign to change the Marriage Act in the metropolitan society in the 1740s, it was argued that polygamy was a regular phenomenon because marriages could be made by verbal contracts and solemnised by non-licensed clergymen. See Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 33.

<sup>82</sup> Their concept of a proper legal marriage will be examined in chapter five.

<sup>83</sup> Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 13. For similar remarks, see *An Address on the State of Slavery in the West India Islands* (London, 1824), 11; and Wilberforce, *Appeal to the Religion*, 20.

sexual relations.<sup>84</sup> Abolitionists presented these relations as a common feature of Jamaican society:

The whites with scarcely any exceptions, residing on plantations live in a state of open and avowed concubinage with *black or coloured* [emphasis mine] women.<sup>85</sup>

In order to arouse their readers' passion and encourage them to undertake action, they did not focus on housekeeper relations but on interracial sexual encounters based on force, which ranged from rape to prostitution. Former resident Mark Cook, for instance, told the Slave Trade Committee that 'if an overseer sends for a girl for such purpose, she is obliged to come, or else be flogged!'<sup>86</sup> This focus also allowed the abolitionists to construct slave women as naturally chaste. As missionaries showed most clearly in their reports, housekeeper relations were not only based on mutual consent but were often also initiated by slave women.<sup>87</sup>

Another strategy that was adopted to construct slave women as naturally chaste, was the use of accounts of slave women's resistance to sexual abuse. Mark Cook, for example, related the story of a woman who ran away with her husband and her children when her overseer sent for her.<sup>88</sup> Former overseer Benjamin McMahon

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<sup>84</sup> Evangelical abolitionists and missionaries also addressed interracial sexual relations. Their focus on interslave relations stemmed mainly from the fact that they based their writings on their own or other missionaries' experiences in the island. As missionaries were above all concerned to establish monogamy among the slaves, the sex life of their members played a prominent role in their reports. See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, chap. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Cooper as cited in *Negro Slavery: Or, a View of Some of the More Prominent Features of That State of Society* (London, 1823), 53. (Former) missionaries especially addressed the housekeeper relations. See, for example, the statement of Rev. John Barry in *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 70; and Godwin, *Lectures on Colonial Slavery*, 68.

<sup>86</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 194. Lieutenant Baker-Davison told the Committee that 'such purposes' could involve sex with a friend of the master or the overseer for which the latter often received a monetary compensation. See *ibid.*, 181.

<sup>87</sup> See, for instance, Rev. John Barry's statement before the 1832 'Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery' that slave mothers encouraged their coloured daughters to cohabit with white estate officers. *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 71.

<sup>88</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 174.



provided a different but equally successful account of resistance. A slave mother whose daughter was raped by her master's friend 'made so serious a disturbance' that the master 'deemed it prudent to give her a sum of money . . . to prevent exposure at the government house.'<sup>89</sup> Most accounts of resistance, however, ended in failure, especially fictive accounts. The mulatto girl Jenny in Elisabeth Helme's *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest* (1824) dies after her master has poisoned and raped her, while Flowney in Robert Bage's *Man as He Is* (1792) commits suicide after she is raped by both her owner and his white servant.<sup>90</sup> Flowney is presented as an extremely virtuous slave girl. She is not one of those 'poor black women tinkit honour to be taken notice of by white man' but a Christian who 'tought it was great sin . . . so she refused to gratify master Benfield.'<sup>91</sup> Her suicide epitomises her chastity and purity. She feels so tainted by the event that she is unable to marry her fiancé, the black slave man Fidel Benihango. As she cannot live without him, however, she decides to drown herself. Before she goes to the pond, she tells an old slave woman about the rape and instructs her to: 'Tell Benihango all. It kill him to know, but it kill me first.'<sup>92</sup> Such desperate accounts of resistance then not only served to arouse passion but also to convince the readers that the project of a free Jamaica would succeed. Upon emancipation, the women would fulfil an important requisite for their role as moral regenerators: chastity.

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<sup>89</sup> B. McMahon, *Jamaica Plantership* (London, 1839), 121. This instance occurred in 1836. McMahon mentioned it to show that the Abolition Act had failed to improve the women's status. He could not conceive of a considerable improvement until the 'the whole race of the planters are superseded by a new one.'

<sup>90</sup> E. Helme, *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest: Or, an Affecting Portrait of Virtue and Vice*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, 1824), 475 and R. Bage, *Man as He is* (London, 1792), as reprinted in S. Aravamudan, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings of the British Romantic Period* (London: Pickering & Cato, 1999), vol. 6 *Fiction*, 137-142. Further references are to this version.

<sup>91</sup> Bage, *Man as He*, 137. The sexual abuse of slave women in abolitionist fiction was always presented as having been provoked by the woman's beauty rather than her sexual passion.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

The abolitionist debate about interracial sexual relations, however, was more than a narrative of abuse and resistance. It also posed the question as to why slave women were abused on such a large scale. Two explanations were given: the white men's inability to control their sexual passion; and the planters' desire for increased profits. James Losh mentioned both in a speech given in Newcastle in March 1824:

They are considered as beings created solely to gratify *the avarice or the brutal appetites* [emphasis mine] of their masters - indeed, never treated as women, except for some vile purpose.<sup>93</sup>

The 'brutal appetites' were not seen as a congenital defect but as a viral infection. Abolitionists contended that slavery had corrupted the sexual mores of slaves and whites alike. This was most clearly expressed in *Address to the Public on the Present State of the Question Relative to Negro Slavery in the British Colonies* (1828):

The unbounded licentiousness existing among the blacks, extending its baneful influence over the white population, paralyzing every feeling of morality, and permitting practices abhorrent to humanity, and unknown in civilized society.<sup>94</sup>

It was especially the lower-rank estate officers who were presented as victims of slavery. Rev. Thomas Cooper, for instance, attributed their sexual excess to the fact that their employers refused to 'employ them if they had a wife and family'.<sup>95</sup>

Not surprisingly, abolitionists were most outraged about the sexual abuse committed by planters. Some conveyed their lack of sexual restraint by mentioning

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<sup>93</sup> *The Speech of James Losh, in the Guildhall Newcastle-upon-Tyne on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1824* (Newcastle, 1824), 10.

<sup>94</sup> *Address to the Public on the Present State of the Question Relative to Negro Slavery* (York, 1828), 13.

<sup>95</sup> Cooper as cited in Riland, *Memoirs*, 203.

that they even abused their own daughters. Benjamin McMahon mentioned that planter Richard P. Martin had

purchased his mulatto daughter from Water Valley estate. He made her compel to his desires and she had several of his children. But the evil did not rest here; for, as afterwards appeared, he had other children by his quadroon daughters.<sup>96</sup>

McMahon clearly presented Martin as a deviation from the metropolitan ideal of masculinity. He not only failed to control his sexual passion and discharge it through the legitimate channels but also failed to exercise his fatherly duties; fathers were supposed to allow their daughters to be pure and innocent.<sup>97</sup>

Abolitionists also strongly criticised planters for condoning and even actively encouraging the interracial sexual relations of their white employees. It was argued that planters refrained from interference because they gained the value of new slaves.<sup>98</sup> They were also seen to make a (short-term) profit by prostituting their slave women to white men in the island. Rev. James Ramsay mentioned, for instance, that many urban slaveholding women hired slave women out and took 'an account of their gains.'<sup>99</sup> Thus according to the abolitionists, planters were as much victims of slavery as the slaves and the estate officers. Their sexual licentiousness and the encouragement that they gave to that of their staff stemmed from the drive for profits on which the system of slavery was based.

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<sup>96</sup> McMahon, *Jamaica Plantership*, 135. For a similar remark, see Ramsay, *Essay on the Conversion*, 135.

<sup>97</sup> On the metropolitan ideal of fatherhood, see Tosh, *Man's Place*, chap. 4.

<sup>98</sup> See, for instance, *Memoirs of Charles Campbell at Present Prisoner in the Jail of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1827), 18 and *An Address on the State of Slavery in the West India Islands* (1824), 11.

<sup>99</sup> Ramsay, *Essay on the Conversion*, 204. Lieutenant Baker-Davison was of the opinion that the practice was not restricted to the cities. See *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 183. Chapter six will show that Ramsay's remark was part of a very wide attack on white Jamaican women.

According to Ramsay, mulatto slave women were especially singled out for the purpose of prostitution. In fact, he suggested in his *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* that black slave women were seldom the victim of white men's sexual lust. Like some early colonialists, he was of the opinion that white men's sexual relations with coloured slave women posed a threat to social stability; once pursued by a white man, a coloured slave woman acquired a taste for white men and declined to marry in her own rank.<sup>100</sup> Such a concern about the blurring of the colour line was no longer expressed in the 1820s and 1830s. Sexual abuse was then presented as an issue that affected black and coloured slave women to the same extent and was seen as equally objectionable. For instance, fictional accounts of sexual abuse include both black and coloured slave women as victims. Contrary to *Hamel, the Obeah Man*, they do not provide differential descriptions of both categories of slave women. The black Mimba in *The Koromantyn Slaves* (1823), for instance, is as much as the mulatto Jenny in *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest* presented as an innocent victim and as an extremely beautiful woman.<sup>101</sup>

While few abolitionists agreed with Ramsay that sexual abuse was a destabilising factor in Jamaican society, they accepted his idea that it had a detrimental effect on reproduction because it led to venereal diseases.<sup>102</sup> In the 1820s and 1830s, natural increase was seldom put forward as an objection to sexual abuse. More important then was the idea that it prevented slave men from exercising their role as protector of the home. In fact, some abolitionists were more concerned about the effects of sexual abuse on the women's partners than on the women themselves.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> *The Kormantyn Slaves: Or, West-Indian Sketches* (London: 1823), 123. One of the main characters in the novel was 'particularly struck' with Mimba's appearance, while Jenny is described as a 'remarkably handsome' woman. Helme, *Farmer of Inglewood*, 474.

They invited the reader to empathise with the male slave who could not prevent his wife or daughter from being abused.<sup>103</sup> Thomas Clarkson, for instance, asked his male reader what he would do if his wife or daughter was 'torn from him, with a knowledge, that they are going to be compelled to submit to the lust of an overseer!'<sup>104</sup>

While pamphlets such as Clarkson's portray the male slave as silently enduring his partner's abuse, fictive accounts present him above all as an angry man, actively trying to defend his partner's chastity. His act of resistance had to convince the readers that nature had endowed slave men with the ability to maintain stable, monogamous unions and carry out their proper gender roles. One of the earliest fictive accounts of sexual abuse is a poem by Edward Rushton, an outspoken opponent of the slave trade. It relates Loango's attempts to come to terms with the fact that three days earlier, the overseer had taken his wife Quamua away for indecent purposes. Initially, Loango is convinced that Quamua will resist the overseer. Gradually, however, he interprets her absence as an indication that she prefers the overseer to him:

three long, long nights still absent! 'Tis too plain,  
the white man pleases, and my hopes are in vain.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See, for example, *Negro Slavery*, 53.

<sup>103</sup> It was especially abolitionist fictional writers who used this strategy. Most fictive accounts of sexual abuse narrate the event through the eyes of the woman's partner or her father. See, for instance, the short story 'Zangara, or the Negro Slave' in *The Negro's Friend: Or, the Sheffield Anti-Slavery Album* (Sheffield, 1826), 8-47.

<sup>104</sup> T. Clarkson, *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies: With a View to Their Ultimate Emancipation* (London, 1824), iv. Rev. G. Whitfield made a similar appeal to the readers in his *Remarks on the Justice and Immorality of Slavery in Eight Letters* (London, 1830), 5. Slave men's attitude to the sexual abuse of their partners has been the subject of numerous studies on slavery. Traditionally scholars have argued that slave men abstained from action and that this indicates that slavery 'emasculated' slave men. See, for instance, Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 167. More recently it has been argued that slave men's lack of action only shows that slavery stripped them of their patriarchal status; it did not take away the most essential attributes of manhood, such as virility and strength. See, for instance, bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 20-22.

<sup>105</sup> [E. Rushton], *West-Indian Eclogues* (London, 1787), 23.

This thought enrages him so much that he decides to kill both the overseer and his wife:

Come then, revenge, and 'midst this horrid roar  
 My thirsty knife shall drink their streaming gore.  
 Come, swiftly come, and aid me to surprise  
 These guilty lovers acting o'er their joys;  
 .....  
 Then to the place, with frenzy fir'd, he fled,  
 and the next morn beheld the mangled dead!<sup>106</sup>

The fictive accounts of sexual abuse published in the 1820s and 1830s are based on the same scenario: the male partner fails to prevent the abuse and avenges the act by shooting the rapist.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, abolitionists objected to sexual abuse because it prevented the establishment of proper legal marriages. It was especially Evangelical abolitionists and missionaries who argued that the Jamaican planting class allowed only an abridged version of the metropolitan marriage in order to ensure that white men in the island had unlimited access to the bodies of female slaves. The Reverend G. W. Craufurd, for instance, mentioned that a slave woman could not adhere to her vow to 'obey her husband' because she had to obey first and foremost her master or overseer, including their demand 'to commit adultery'.<sup>108</sup>

Two proposals were put forward to enable slave women to live up to the metropolitan ideal of female sexuality: (legal) protection against sexual abuse and proper legal marriages. The latter will be discussed in chapter five. As to the former, in the late eighteenth century proposals were put forward to punish white men for having sex with (married) slave women and to compensate slave women who gave

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, *The Koromantyn Slaves*, 236; and Helme, *Farmer of Inglewood*, 475.

<sup>108</sup> Cited in T. Jackson, *Britain's Burden: Or the Intolerable Evils of Colonial Slavery Exposed* (Cambridge, 1832), 18.

birth to mulatto offspring. Edmund Burke, one of the most significant British politicians in the late 1780s and early 1790s, mentioned the first in his *Sketch of the Negro Code* (1792). As a means to 'civilise' the slaves and increase natural reproduction, he suggested that

any white person shall be proved, on information in the supreme court to be exhibited by the protector of negroes to have committed adultery with any negro woman, or to have corrupted any negro woman under sixteen years of age, he shall be fined in the sum of .... and shall be forever disabled from serving the office of Overseer of Negroes, or being attorney to any plantation.<sup>109</sup>

James Anderson, a political economist, proposed a law that would give slave women a year off from work for every mulatto child they gave birth to and allow planters to force their officers to pay for such a loss of labour.<sup>110</sup> Anderson was, in other words, of the opinion that an attack upon the planters' profits was the best means to safeguard slave women's chastity.

In the 1820s and 1830s, abolitionists seldom proposed the criminalization of interracial sex. Like some early colonialists, they favoured the marriage of estate officers as a solution to the problem of interracial sex. Rev. Thomas Cooper, for example, suggested that planters should only employ married estate officers.<sup>111</sup> Whereas the colonialists supported this solution with the idea that slave women were inherently evil temptresses, the abolitionists based it on the assumption that slave women's virtue was corrupted by slavery. For instance, S. M. Welch did not, like

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<sup>109</sup>E. Burke, *Sketch of the Negro Code* (London, 1792), as reprinted in Kitson, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, 203. Further references are to this version. Edward Rushton and Dr. Harrison also proposed some form of legal protection against sexual abuse. See *West Indian Eclogues*, 60 and *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 49.

<sup>110</sup>J. Anderson, *Observations on Slavery: Particularly with a View to Its Effects on the British Colonies in the West Indies* (Manchester, 1789), 17.

<sup>111</sup>Cooper as cited in Riland, *Memoirs*, 203. This suggestion was even more strongly articulated during the Apprenticeship System when it was presented as a precondition for a truly free, moral and civilised Jamaica.

Edward Long, consider it necessary to render white women more attractive to estate officers in order to encourage them to marry, but to encourage 'residential proprietary':

Were the proprietors residents, the overseers would be a very different class of men, they would become married men, living soberly with their families instead of living in a system of concubinage and inebriety which is unfortunately too general.<sup>112</sup>

The change in solutions to combat the problem of interracial sex shows that by the mid-1820s abolitionists were firmly convinced that slavery had not only a morally corrupting influence on the slaves but also on white Jamaicans. Following chapters will illustrate that the abolitionist campaign for emancipation involved more than the freeing of the slaves; it aimed for a complete transformation of Jamaican society.

### Conclusions

Both colonialists and abolitionists regarded slave women's sexuality as deviant and dangerous. Many colonialists naturalised slave women's deviation from the metropolitan ideal of female sexuality and presented it as a threat to their projects of natural increase, stability, and productivity. Abolitionists attributed slave women's deviant sexuality to slavery. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they regarded it primarily as a danger for the slave community. During the campaign for emancipation, they presented it as an issue that affected the whole of Jamaican society. They argued that both black and white male Jamaicans had to change their

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<sup>112</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 140.



sexual mores to enable slave women to be chaste and hence create a more moral and civilised order.

Two images of slave women dominated the debate about slave women's sexuality: the 'scheming Jezebel' and the 'Angel'. The debate, however, was not strictly divided between these two images, with colonialists adhering to the first and abolitionists to the second. It has been shown that within each side multiple images of slave women jostled for power. The 'scheming Jezebel' was a strong image in colonialist discourse, especially in the late eighteenth century, but faced strong competition from the 'potentially virtuous' slave woman presented by non-resident colonialists and the 'virtuous' slave woman which appeared in the 1820s and early 1830s to deny the abolitionist contention that white Jamaican society was as immoral as slave society. While most abolitionists presented slave women as naturally chaste, there were some who provided images of promiscuous slave women which suggested that their virtue was more potential than real. Both images, however, added to the construction of slave women mentioned in the previous chapter; namely, that of suffering and innocent victims.

Colonialist and abolitionist representations of slave women's sexuality were in various ways linked to the shift that occurred in the perception of female sexuality in the metropolitan society in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries. For centuries, women were regarded as the lascivious sex. It was argued that sexual lust originated with them and that men were merely the victims of their wanton power.<sup>113</sup> By the early nineteenth century, middle-class women were no longer seen as sexual temptresses but as passionless goddesses. This shift was central to their claim to a higher morality. Their openness to emotional life around them and

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<sup>113</sup> hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 29-30.

quickness in reading the feelings of others was seen to give them special qualities in the moral sphere.<sup>114</sup> The images of slave women's deviant sexuality facilitated the construction of middle-class women as naturally passionless, while the sexual abuse that they suffered at the hands of white men depended to some extent on this construction.<sup>115</sup> To sustain their idealisation of women in their own society as innocent and virtuous, middle-class men in the metropolitan society accommodated their sexual desires by having sex with women who were considered to be beyond the pale of womanhood, such as working-class women and prostitutes. In slave societies, the most suitable object for this purpose was the enslaved woman.<sup>116</sup>

It was not only metropolitan notions of sexuality and womanhood that were invoked in the debate about slave women's sexuality. The metropolitan ideal of manhood featured especially in abolitionist remarks about interracial sexual relations. They not only expressed the idea that proper men were able to control their sex drive and release it only through the legitimate channel of marriage but also that protection of and control over wife and children was one of the most important gender roles of men. Colonialists invoked this ideal of manhood in the 1820s as a result of abolitionist attacks. Various attempts were made to construct the planters and their officers as proper men. Around the same time, colonialists drew more heavily on notions of race, as denoting skin colour. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they usually contrasted slave women's sexuality with that of white women.

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<sup>114</sup> Tosh, *Man's Place*, 44. This claim to a higher morality and the accompanying change in sexual nature gradually extended to other classes in society.

<sup>115</sup> Gilman's *Difference and Pathology* examines the extent to which Victorian discourses of sexuality used images of black women, including those of Caribbean slave women. In her article 'Rape, Race, and Colonial Culture', *American Historical Review* 100, 2 (1995), 335-59, Pamela Scully suggests that the image of the promiscuous slave woman affected the ways in which European colonisers in South Africa viewed African female sexuality.

<sup>116</sup> Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 51. According to bell hooks, the sexual exploitation of slave women was more than a means to sustain the ideal of the passionless, middle-class woman. She also sees it as a means by which white men tried to deal with their deep fear and distrust of women. They displaced all

In the 1820s, they also distinguished between the sexuality of coloured and black slave women. The former was seen as more dangerous than the latter because it posed more of a threat to stability and productivity. This more prominent articulation of colour distinctions in later colonialist writings can be seen as an indication that colonialists began to recast their ideas about the natural difference of slaves into a discourse of race. This discourse became more prominent with full freedom in 1838 when it was used to explain the social inequalities in Jamaican society by ascribing them to nature.<sup>117</sup> Only a few abolitionists invoked notions of race in the late eighteenth century. In the 1820s and early 1830s they represented all slave women as full and equal members of the human race.

Historians of North American slavery have recently begun to address the question of how central sex was to the way power was exercised in the antebellum slave society. Based on slave narratives, slave laws and other sources, they have described the various measures that planters used to control or direct the sexuality of their slave women, such as providing them with a mate and punishing white overseers for having sex with slave women.<sup>118</sup> Historians of Caribbean slavery have thus far paid little attention to this question apart from stating that the (threat of) sexual abuse of slave women was a means to control the slave labour force.<sup>119</sup> This chapter has not denied that sexual abuse was a means through which planters exercised power. But it has been more concerned to explain the contradiction between the planters' rhetoric

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the negative sexist stereotypes of the female from white onto black women so that the latter were eventually seen as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust. See *Ain't I a Woman*, 29-33.

<sup>117</sup> As various scholars have pointed out, race played little role in creating or justifying slavery but assumed a central role in the Victorian discourse of the nation when it was used to define who was a real British subject and who not. See K. Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (London: Macmillan, 1996), chap. 1.

<sup>118</sup> See, for instance, T. Jennings, 'Us Colored Women Had to Go through a Plenty: Sexual Exploitation of African-American Women', *Journal of Women's History* 1, 3 (1990), 45-74; and H. Lecaudey, 'Behind the Mask: Ex-Slave Women and Interracial Sexual Relations', in P. Morton, ed., *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 260-77.

and practice regarding slave women's sexuality. While planters presented slave women's sexuality as a danger to their enterprises, they did very little to contain it. The various suggestions to curb interracial sex and the proposals to encourage slaves and white estate officers to marry were seldom taken up.<sup>120</sup> This chapter has concentrated on the first solution to slave women's unruly sexuality. It has concluded that the planters' reluctance to combat interracial sex was not only caused by contextual factors, such as a paucity of white women, but also by the perception of slave women as property and the perceived positive effects of interracial sex on the exercise of control and profits. The following chapter examines the second solution and will lend support to the thesis that the contradiction between rhetoric and practice stemmed from the fact that planters perceived the benefits of slave women's unruly sexuality to be greater than the costs of controlling it and that these benefits reached beyond the material.

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<sup>119</sup> See, for instance, Dadzie, 'The Invisible Woman'.

<sup>120</sup> The practice of locking slave women up at night was only adopted on a few estates managed by William Taylor. There are two suggestions that very few planters adopted the suggestions put forward by Long, Adair and Moreton. First, the question as to whether it was common practice in Jamaica to provide white male guests on estates with a female slave occupied a central role in the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery. Second, various abolitionists put forward proposals to encourage white officers to marry.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SLAVE MARRIAGE: SOLUTION OR PROBLEM?**

Throughout the period 1780-1838 colonialists posed the question, Should planters encourage their slaves to marry and if so, what kind of slave marriage would suit their interests best? The first section of this chapter examines the answers given to this question in the period 1780-1834. It shows that colonialists gradually developed a more positive attitude towards slave marriage. This shift in the debate occurred alongside a change in the practice regarding slave marriage. Section two describes and explains this change. It also poses the question why Jamaican planters were reluctant to encourage slave marriage in the period 1780-1834. Planters in the Antebellum South, for example, were convinced that marriage among slaves had to be promoted and maintained for social stability. They performed marriages among their slaves or delegated this to the churches and tried to give the marriages support and discipline by monitoring them closely within the framework of church discipline.<sup>1</sup> This section attempts to provide some clues as to why Caribbean and Antebellum slaveholders held different ideas about slave marriage. Future research will have to provide a more conclusive answer to this question by making a careful assessment of the economic, political, cultural and social factors that were present in Caribbean slave societies in the fifty years before emancipation but absent in the Antebellum South. The third section examines how the change in the legality of marriage brought about by the Abolition Act affected the colonialist debate. The last section summarises the changes in the colonialist notion of the ideal slave marriage and the

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius, 'Slave Marriages', 128-29.

practices surrounding it and concludes that the colonialist debate about slave marriage was a highly contradictory debate.

### **From an Undesirable to an Acceptable Institution**

Colonialist opinion about slave marriage was extremely divided in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While some colonialists argued that slave marriage was unnecessary and even undesirable, others suggested that planters should do their utmost to encourage it. They took a more unanimous stand with regard to slaves' domestic life. Very idyllic pictures of domestic life in the slave quarters were presented which suggested that slaves did not lack the means to carry out their domestic roles.

Colonialists who favoured slave marriage, predominantly non-residents, argued that it would lead to natural increase and enhance the stability of the estates. The first benefit was most clearly expressed by Hector McNeill in 1788:

Were one third of the slaves who are fit for propagation, to be regularly joined in wedlock, and were they to conform even tolerably to its institution, the number of negroes in this island would be considerably increased.<sup>2</sup>

Lady Nugent went even further by stating that it would 'render the necessity of the slave trade out of question'.<sup>3</sup> She referred to the second benefit when she mentioned that the owner of Plumstead had informed her that his married slaves were more

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<sup>2</sup> McNeill, *Observations*, 35.

<sup>3</sup> Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 118.

'sober, quiet and well-behaved' than the unmarried slaves.<sup>4</sup> Several suggestions were put forward to encourage slave marriage. The most common was a system of material incentives. For instance, Paul Gibbs suggested in his slave management manual that planters should provide newly-weds with a plot of land and a cabin.<sup>5</sup> James Adair advocated a similar reward scheme but with the condition that newly-weds had to be 'able to read' and had shown 'good behaviour in general.'<sup>6</sup> As few slaves were literate, this condition clearly served to limit the planters' expenses. It was also a means to encourage the slave population to behave better and hence facilitate stability. Adair seems to have been of the opinion that slaves were so interested in advancing their material situation that they would even actively participate in the missionary churches, which at the time were the only means for slaves to acquire literacy skills.<sup>7</sup>

It was argued that slave marriage could only lead to natural increase and stability if it was indissoluble and above all monogamous. Hence, the suggestion that the reward schemes should be accompanied by measures to curtail interracial sex. These were to prevent slave women from breaking up their relationships with slave men and slave men from having multiple partners. Lady Nugent was one of several non-resident colonialists who saw slave marriage and a reform of the sexual mores of white men in the island as two sides of the same coin: the creation of a more civilized and efficient slave society. To support her claim, she quoted a slave man replying to his master's suggestion that he should marry: 'Hi, massa, you telly me marry one

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>5</sup> Gibbs, *Instructions*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 161.

<sup>7</sup> At the time, there were only a few Moravian, Methodist and Baptist missionaries in the island. Instruction in literacy skills only occupied a central role in their work in the 1820s when they set up Sunday schools. See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 87. Adair's view that missionaries had a positive effect on the slaves was not widely held among West Indian planters. The majority considered them as an extremely disrupting factor.

wife, which is no good! You no tinky I see you buckra no content with one, two, three or four wives.<sup>8</sup>

Resident colonialists did not regard marriage as a solution to the twin problems of natural reproduction and stability. They argued that it was not only difficult but also futile to encourage slaves to marry. The first argument played a central role in a debate about slave marriage in the House of Assembly in 1788:

These people are universally known to claim a right of disposing themselves in this respect, according to their own will and pleasure, without any control from their masters.<sup>9</sup>

The House rejected a law to encourage slaves to marry on the grounds that planter interference in the slaves' relational lives would lead to fierce resistance and hence upset the stability of the estates. As to the futility of slave marriage, it was argued that the slaves' sexual passions were so strong that it would never become stable and monogamous. John Stewart mentioned, for instance, in 1808 that it was unlikely that married slaves would 'relinquish the pleasures, or resist the temptation, of an unrestrained sexual intercourse . . . imbued as their minds are with strong passions.'<sup>10</sup>

That the view of slave marriage as unnecessary, impractical and undesirable was widely held in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be deduced from the fact that little was done at the level of the House of Assembly and the individual estates to increase the marital rate. The House dismissed not only proposals to facilitate slave marriage that were presented by its own members but also those that came from the government at home. Like most West Indian legislatures, it rejected

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<sup>8</sup> Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 118. For similar remarks, see McNeill, *Observations*, 41; Foot, *Observations*, 96; Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments*, 161; and Moreton, *West India Customs*, 160.

<sup>9</sup> Report of the Jamaican House of Assembly on the Slave Issues November 1788 cited in Craton, 'Changing Patterns', 1. This remark was made in the discussion about amending the Slave Law.

<sup>10</sup> [Stewart], *Account of Jamaica*, 277. For similar remarks, see Long, *History*, 415; and McNeill, *Observations*, 40.



the suggestion made by the Secretary of State, the Duke of Portland, in April 1798 to encourage slave marriage by enacting a reward scheme similar to that of Gibbes and by taxing planters more for unmarried than married slaves.<sup>11</sup> There is evidence that some planters did adopt a reward scheme. Lady Nugent, for instance, recalled in her journal that planter Vaughan had 'induced' many of his slaves to marry.<sup>12</sup> The reality on most estates, however, was closer to Stephen Fuller's statement before the Slave Trade Committee that slaves were 'left entirely free with respect to marriage.'<sup>13</sup>

The same colonialists who expressed the view that it was futile to encourage slave marriage provided descriptions of slave domestic life which suggested that most slaves maintained stable, monogamous unions in which the partners had adopted gendered spheres and gendered roles. James Tobin, for instance, constructed in his *Cursory Remarks upon the Reverend Mr. Ramsay's Essay* (1805) the slave man as the provider and the slave woman as the distributor of the family's provisions:

The food and what slave men raise . . . enable their wives (who are naturally much better caterers and cooks than the lower order of women in England) not only to prepare the most nourishing but the most savoury meals for their husbands and children.<sup>14</sup>

This contradiction stemmed from the fact that their remarks about slave domesticity served a different purpose than those about marriage. Whereas the latter were used to combat their fellow colonialists' argument that marriage was an excellent means for

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<sup>11</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 122, 65-66. Planters had to pay a poll tax based on the number of their slaves. The government's advice was only successful in the Leewards Islands. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 351.

<sup>12</sup> Cundall, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 307.

<sup>13</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 69, 213. Fuller was the agent of Jamaica. Several anti-slavery witnesses confirmed his conclusion. See the statements of Dr. Harrison and Dr. Jackson in *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82.

<sup>14</sup> [Tobin], *Cursory Remarks*, 96. Metropolitan writers used methods of food preparation as a means to distinguish middle-class women from other women. For instance, roasting rather than baking meat was seen as a sign of middle-class respectability. For more information on this rhetorical strategy of social distinction, see Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 284 and 380-81.

natural reproduction and stability, the former served to deny the abolitionist contention that planters treated their slave women inhumanely. They were as eager as their fellow colonialists to show that the daily toil in the field and other tasks imposed on slave women did not prevent them from carrying out those rights and duties which were allocated to middle-class women in the metropolitan society upon marriage. This was not only done through idyllic pictures of slaves' domestic life such as Tobin's, but also through remarks about particular roles and functions carried out by slave women. Resident colonialist Gilbert Francklyn, for example, addressed a slave woman's role to nurse her husband when ill. He tried very hard to convince his readers that slave women were as able as middle-class English women to carry out this important conjugal duty:

When I say his wife is suffered to attend him, I don't mean merely that she is suffered to sit up with and watch him at night, but that in case where the disorder is serious and the danger considerable, at his or her wish, she is withdrawn from the labour of the field, and permitted to bestow her unremitting care and attention on him.<sup>15</sup>

Most of the scenes of domestic life centred on the preparation of a meal, which was presented as a happy pastime and requiring no effort at all from the slave woman. Colonialists omitted the more mundane household duties of slave women, such as washing and mending clothes, and also did not mention the fact that slave women worked on the provision grounds during the weekend. This omission served to convince the readers that slave women were much better positioned than lower-class English women to live up to the metropolitan ideal of the homemaker; that is, the

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<sup>15</sup> Francklyn, *Observations*, 35-36. For other scenes of domestic life, see Beckford, *Remarks*, 277; and *A Short Journey in the West Indies in Which are Interspersed Curious Anecdotes and Characters* (London, 1800), 117.

woman who creates and manages a home where her family's material and emotional needs are sufficiently met.<sup>16</sup> In fact, this rhetorical strategy suggested that slave women already conformed to this ideal.

It needs to be emphasised that except for Jesse Foot who suggested that married women should be withdrawn from the field, none of the colonialists who favoured slave marriage argued that it had to centre on the home.<sup>17</sup> In their opinion, married slaves did not necessarily have to be co-resident to facilitate natural increase or stability nor did slave wives have to be secluded in the hut. This notion of slave marriage was further developed in the 1820s and early 1830s when more colonialists displayed a positive attitude to slave marriage. This change in attitude was in most cases not the result of perceived benefits of slave marriage but of abolitionist accusations that planters did little to encourage slave marriage and make it conform to the metropolitan ideal of marriage. The latter was a legally sanctioned union of which permanency, monogamy, co-residence and gendered spheres of activity and authority were the key attributes.<sup>18</sup> The colonialist discussion consisted in this period, then, primarily of arguments to deny these accusations. A first set of arguments aimed to show that formal slave marriages were fully legal and that their numbers had increased over the years. For instance, Rev. G. W. Bridges informed his readers that between 1821 and 1823, he had married 187 couples in the parish of Manchester.<sup>19</sup> In addition, James McQueen expressed the opinion that the couples married by Bridges

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<sup>16</sup> The ideal was part of the wider ideology of domesticity, which propagated the home and family values. The latter involved also a particular set of masculine roles and functions. See Tosh, *Man's Place*.

<sup>17</sup> Foot, *Defence*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> This definition of the ideal middle-class marriage is based on Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*; and A. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> Rev. Bridges cited in Riland, *Memoirs*, 200. For similar arguments, see Barclay, *Practical View*, 91; and the statement of the attorney James Simpson in *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 393. It is interesting to note that the official return of slave marriages lists only eight slave couples for this parish in this period. *PP* 1823, vol. XVIII, 320-21.

and other Anglican clergymen had the 'same legal sanction' as that of 'every person in Britain.'<sup>20</sup>

A second set of arguments served to explain why in spite of the increase so many slaves remained unmarried.<sup>21</sup> The abolitionist claim that the low marital rate was above all the result of planters' policies was strongly denied. This was especially so in the case of slaves who did not marry because they faced the threat of separation. Barclay and McQueen, for instance, mentioned that planters always ensured that married couples were sold together.<sup>22</sup> They and others attributed the low incidence of slave marriage to the slaves themselves. This was done by using the 'old' argument of the impracticability and futility of slave marriage. Several colonialists mentioned that slaves did not like interference in their relational lives and that any attempt to force marriage upon them would lead to fierce resistance.<sup>23</sup> This argument was often supported with firsthand accounts. Barclay, for instance, mentioned that his attempts to keep a slave couple together (the woman had left her husband and their five children for another man) had been unsuccessful:

I could scarcely at first believe it, but privately cautioned the parties (who denied the charge) of the consequences, if it should prove true. On further complaint made, I again admonished them, threatened and ultimately punished, but to no purpose . . .<sup>24</sup>

As to the futility of slave marriage, it was argued that slaves failed to establish stable and monogamous unions not only because of their strong sexual passions but also because of their lack of mental capacity to understand the marriage contract. The

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<sup>20</sup> McQueen, *The West India Colonies*, 279.

<sup>21</sup> There are no official returns of the number of formal marriages for the period 1823-1834. Contemporary accounts, however, suggest that the number remained very low. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 369.

<sup>22</sup> Barclay, *Practical View*, 55; and McQueen, *The West India Colonies*, 271.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 102; and *ibid.*, 280.

<sup>24</sup> Barclay, *Practical View*, 102.

latter was especially conveyed in remarks about slave men who left their wives and failed to provide for their offspring and free men who married or lived with slave women in order to share their allowances.<sup>25</sup> It was argued that both sets of men failed to understand one of the most important duties of husbands: to provide wife and children with material sustenance. Some colonialists went even further and argued that these men also lacked affection for their wife and offspring. Thus Anthony Davis mentioned in 1832 that

many a negro might at once [upon manumission] quit his wife and children, and seek another woman, pretending that he had lost his original marriage paper, and knowing that all he left behind would continue to be provided for by his master!<sup>26</sup>

Remarks such as these, which emphasised the difference of slave men, became more common in the late 1820s when more abolitionists demanded immediate emancipation without compensation to the slaveholders.<sup>27</sup> They were used to convince the readers that the slaves were not ready for, or even capable of, immediate freedom. Cynric Williams mentioned, for instance, in 1827:

When we reflect on this, it becomes a serious matter for the whites to think of emancipating their slaves; - a few hours work daily, for only a few weeks in the year, would enable a negro to bring up a family, though blacky would rather his wife, or wives, should work for him, while he smokes his pipe.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 57; McQueen, *The West India Colonies*, 301; T. Foulks, *Eighteen Months in Jamaica with Recollections of the Late Rebellion* (London, 1833), 102; [Davis], *The West Indies*, 72; and *An Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Justice, Humanity and Religion in a Letter Addressed to Henry Bright* (Bristol, 1823), 16. This deviation of slave men from the metropolitan ideal of masculinity caused concern because it increased the planters' costs and hence reduced their profits.

<sup>26</sup> [Davis], *The West Indies*, 72. His remark clearly reflects the influence of the metropolitan discourse on marriage, which presented the ideal middle-class marriage as an affectionate and harmonious union. See Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 248 and 336.

<sup>27</sup> The radical anti-slavery current developed partly as the result of the Jamaican legislature's stern refusal to adopt the government's amelioration scheme that was launched in May 1823. Although many veteran abolitionist leaders like Clarkson and Stephen agreed with the 'immediatists' that no hope should be invested in voluntary action by the colonial legislatures, they remained proponents of gradual emancipation. See Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 422-23.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, *Tour through the Island*, 224. For a similar description of domestic life, see Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 307.

They coexisted, however, with remarks that affirmed the slaves' ability to enter upon a Christian marriage. For instance, several colonialists mentioned that slaves would refrain from 'concubinage' and opt for a marriage if 'knowledge and intelligence' was spread among them. James McQueen provided a firsthand account to demonstrate the necessity of education:

I have heard of its having been attempted to engage uneducated slaves in the bonds of marriage. In a few weeks they were broken through, and the missionary and master by what authority I know not, separated, divorced and remarried the parties. We may shudder to contemplate such scenes as these, but every premature attempt to enforce such obligations, must be productive of similar results.<sup>29</sup>

Very few colonialists suggested ways to spread knowledge among the slaves. John Stewart thought that religious instruction was the most effective means:

Were they, however, duly instructed in the Christian religion, there can be no doubt that it would at least give a check to polygamy among them, if it did not altogether do away with it.<sup>30</sup>

Most resident colonialists dismissed his idea. As they regarded religious instruction as a highly destabilising factor, they argued that the work carried out by missionaries, especially the Nonconformists, since the late eighteenth century had not succeeded in transforming the slaves' sexual mores. The main character in the novel *Marly*

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<sup>29</sup> McQueen, *The West India Colonies*, 280-81. Barclay expressed a similar view. *Practical View*, 101-02. Such 'blame-the-victim' rhetoric served to deny the abolitionist accusation that planters did not do enough to encourage slave marriage.

<sup>30</sup> J. Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica* (Edinburgh, 1823) 310. This is a clear deviation from his earlier view on the impact of Christianity on slaves' sexuality as expressed in *Account of Jamaica*, 277. Many non-residents agreed with him. The West India Committee, for instance, actively promoted religious instruction for the slaves. See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 19.

concluded, for instance, that religion had not affected slave women in a 'moral light'; they continued to offer themselves, married or single, to white men.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that most of the abolitionist suggestions to increase the marital rate were swept aside demonstrates that although colonialists were more positive about slave marriage in this period, they remained extremely reluctant to encourage it. James McQueen dismissed the abolitionist proposal to enforce formal marriage on the grounds that slaves lacked at present a sufficient degree of intelligence. Alexander Barclay used a different argument:

If it would be so good a thing for the negroes, why should not the people at home have the benefit of marriage being enforced among them.<sup>32</sup>

He rejected in similar vain the abolitionist proposal to withdraw married women from the field. Since lower-class English women 'earned their bread by field labour', he saw no 'good reason why the black women should all be made ladies.'<sup>33</sup> In fact, he provided several arguments to show that slave women's conjugal duties were not at all endangered by the institution of slavery. Nursing mothers, for instance, cooked their husbands a decent breakfast, which they took out to them when they went to work.<sup>34</sup> While some rejections of abolitionist proposals suggested a similarity of slaves with lower-class Englishmen, others expressed the idea that they were inherently different. It was argued, for example, that it was futile to adopt measures to facilitate the co-residence of slaves because slave men had an innate desire for women from other estates. A character in *Marly* mentioned that slave men did not 'fix their affections' on

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<sup>31</sup> *Marly*, 134. Resident colonialists feared especially the missionaries' teaching that God had made all men equal. See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Barclay, *Practical View*, 101.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 422. This remark demonstrates that the colonialist concept of race was far more intertwined with class than skin colour. Colonialists saw little difference between slave women and lower-class English women. The latter were at times even considered inferior to slave women.

women of their own estate but preferred to 'wander upon the neighbouring estates and seeks wives there.'<sup>35</sup>

We see, then, that in the 1820s and early 1830s the colonialist notion of slave marriage, which was expressed by both resident and non-resident colonialists, conformed to some extent to the metropolitan ideal of marriage: a slave marriage was to be monogamous and indissoluble and the partners were to carry out distinct roles. It deviated from the metropolitan ideal in that it did not centre on the home, that is it omitted co-residence and the seclusion of women in the home. This deviation stemmed to some extent from economic considerations. The withdrawal of married women from the field would lead to a drastic decline in output as women formed at least 50 per cent of the field labour force. The enforcement of co-residence also affected the planters' profit levels as it implied the purchase of new slaves.<sup>36</sup> However, colonialists suggested at times that slave marriage was homebased. Cynric Williams wrote in his travelling account that he

saw a negro woman squatting on the floor attending to cookery of her husband's dinner, which was simmering in an iron pot, and consisted of ochro and ocos, picked crabs and salt fish, with a bit of salt pork. The lady was peeling a few plantains to roast, and the lord of the mansion was inhaling the fumes of tobacco from a short Junko pipe, as he lolled at his ease in his hammock.<sup>37</sup>

And Anthony Davis mentioned that while slave husbands occupied themselves with killing hogs and doing other chores outside, slave wives were at home 'attending the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 317. According to Barclay, nursing mothers started work two hours after the other slaves.

<sup>35</sup> *Marly*, 98. This proposal was also rejected on the grounds that it was 'an act of cruelty' to force co-residence upon the slaves. This argument served above all to demonstrate that the planters were not the inhumane and uncivilised men as abolitionists argued.

<sup>36</sup> To enable couples to live together planters either had to buy their slave men's partners or make arrangements with neighbouring planters to exchange slaves. The first option affected their costs considerably as slave prices had soared after the abolition of the slave trade. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 79.



pigs, a numerous stock of poultry or other domestic affairs.<sup>38</sup> Such descriptions of slave marriages in which the partners not only exercised distinct roles but also occupied separate spheres served as much as the depictions of slave domestic life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to head off abolitionist attacks.

### Official Encouragement to Slave Marriage

The House of Assembly began to display a more positive attitude towards slave marriage in the mid-1820s. In December 1826, it passed the following clause to the Slave Law:

It shall and may be *lawful* [emphasis mine] for any slave or slaves, who has or have been baptised, who may be desirous of entering into the holy state of matrimony, to apply to any clergyman of the established church to solemnise such marriage, who is hereby required to perform the same without any fee or reward, if such clergyman shall, upon examination of such slaves, consider them to have a proper and adequate knowledge of the nature and obligation of such a contract: *Provided always*, that such a slave shall produce to the clergyman *a permission in writing from his owner* [emphasis mine] or from the legal representative of his owner for that purpose.<sup>39</sup>

This clause IV of the 1826 Slave Law, which came into force in February 1831, does not reflect a drastic change in the Assembly's attitude to slave marriage.<sup>40</sup> It was as little convinced as in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that slave marriage yielded benefits for the planters. The clause was primarily the result of

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<sup>37</sup> Williams, *Tour through the Island*, 100. This depiction of slave domesticity clearly contradicts his argument that slaves were not yet ready for emancipation.

<sup>38</sup> [Davis], *The West Indies*, 86-87.

<sup>39</sup> 1826 Slave Law, 2.

<sup>40</sup> PP 1830, vol. XXI, 416; and 453 and PP 1831-32, vol. XLVI, 54. The Colonial Office refused to give consent to the 1826 Slave Law because it disapproved of the clauses regarding the religious worship of the slaves. It approved the revised edition of December 1829, which was rejected by the

pressure from Whitehall to ameliorate the condition of the slaves. The government's amelioration programme of 1823 aimed to increase the slave marital rate. It suggested that colonial Assemblies legalise marriages performed by Nonconformist clergymen and that they enact the following incentive to slave marriage: 'Exempt from future labour in the field, the mother of a given number of children born in wedlock.'<sup>41</sup> This incentive suggests that the programme also tried to make slave marriage conform more closely to the metropolitan ideal. It was not only concerned, however, to ensure that married slave women were able to carry out their conjugal duties within the safe environment of the home but also to facilitate the co-residence of married slaves. It mentioned that 'care must be taken to encourage, as far as possible marriages between slaves attached to the same property.'<sup>42</sup> To convince the planting class of the necessity of co-resident slave marriages, it argued that they aided the stability of the estates as cross-plantation marriages withdrew 'the interest and attachment of the slave from the plantation to which he belongs.'<sup>43</sup>

As mentioned, the House of Assembly refused to adopt any of the ameliorative proposals. In March 1824 the government promulgated an Order in Council for Trinidad. This was a slave code consisting of eight bills to ameliorate the condition of the slaves in the Crown colonies.<sup>44</sup> Its 'Bill for Regulating the Celebration of Marriages among Slaves' incorporated the government's 1823 suggestion to allow Nonconformist missionaries to perform legal marriages but adopted a different incentive to marriage - the abolition of the marriage fee - and

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Privy Council in July 1830. A final version of the Slave Law was eventually accepted in February 1831. For more information on the process of legislation in the colony, see Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> *PP* 1824, vol. XXIV, 439.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> It consisted of the creation of the office of the protector of the slaves; the admission of slave evidence in courts of justice; compulsory manumission of slaves; the encouragement of slave marriage; the observance of Sunday and abolition of public markets on that day; the acquisition of slave property

made no reference to co-residence.<sup>45</sup> The government offered the Order in Council to the House of Assembly as a model code to revise the Slave Law. The Assembly debated the bills in depth and passed two in December 1824: the abolition of Sunday markets and the facilitation of manumission.<sup>46</sup> As it stubbornly refused to adopt the other bills, the Secretary of State ordered the governor in March 1826 to dissolve the Assembly and instruct the new members to reconsider the Order in Council. To facilitate the latter, the governor asked the law officers of the Crown to draft ameliorative bills based on the Order in Council but with regard to the local circumstances and existing laws. The governor presented the draft bills to the Assembly in November 1826. A subcommittee of the Assembly considered them and decided upon several amendments to the Slave Law, which were passed in December.<sup>47</sup>

Clause IV differed in various ways from the 'Bill for Regulating the Celebration of Marriages among Slaves' for Trinidad. Firstly, it did not include a security against the refusal of an owner to give consent. Slaves in Trinidad had the option to summon their owner before a so-called protector of slaves who decided whether the owner had a good reason to refuse permission. Secondly, it only authorised Anglican clergymen to perform marriages. In Trinidad, marriages could also be performed by ministers of the Kirk of Scotland, Catholic priests, and 'any public teacher of religion' that had a 'written licence to celebrate marriages.' Thirdly, it required slaves to undergo an examination by the clergyman. Finally, it did not stipulate that a registry should be kept of slave marriages.<sup>48</sup>

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by slaves and establishment of saving banks; the adoption of means to prevent the separation of slave families; and an amelioration of the punishment of slaves. See *PP* 1826-27, vol. XXV, 61-62.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>46</sup> *PP* 1826, vol. XXIX, 7.

<sup>47</sup> *PP* 1826-27, vol. XXV, 61-63 and 179.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 64; and *PP* 1828, vol. XXVII, 100.

Its deviation from the 1823 government proposals and the Order in Council suggests that clause IV served, like the clause regarding rape, as a symbolic token. The removal of marriage fees led to a much smaller increase in slave marriages than the incentive originally proposed by the government. This was also achieved by incorporating the requisite of an examination. By keeping the number of slave marriages low and the women firmly tied to the field, clause IV guaranteed the stability and productivity of the estates. Stability was also ensured by rejecting the government's proposals to legalise Nonconformist slave marriages and to encourage co-residence. In other words, clause IV tried to satisfy both the government and the local planting class. It promoted an increase in slave marriages that was sufficient enough to satisfy the former's demand for amelioration and the latter's for stability.<sup>49</sup> The planters' wish for stability was also met by the fact that it was based on a notion of marriage advocated in a wide-range of pro-slavery writings at the time: a marriage that did not centre around the home.

The formal marriage promoted in clause IV differed also in other respects from the metropolitan ideal. The latter was a voluntary contract between two consenting individuals that presupposed their individual autonomy and rights. A slave couple required written permission from their owner or his representative and enjoyed only a limited degree of autonomy and rights. A note added to clause IV stipulated that 'marriages of slaves shall not invest the parties with any rights inconsistent with the duties which they owe to their proprietors, or to the government.'<sup>50</sup> This note

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<sup>49</sup> *PP* 1828, vol. XXVII, 100. The Colonial Office disapproved of the fact that Nonconformist missionaries were not allowed to perform slave marriages and that slaves were required to undergo an examination of the marriage contract but eventually accepted the clause. Clause IV went some way towards realising the twofold aim. In the early 1820s an average of 20 marriages were performed annually in the parish of St. David, rising to 36 in the early 1830s. See *PP* 1823, vol. XVIII, 321 and *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 585.

<sup>50</sup> *PP* 1826-27, vol. XXV, 76. This provision was not part of the original Order in Council for Trinidad. It was introduced in the slave law of Demerara and was recommended by the Colonial Office.

suggests most strongly that it was above all a concern about stability, which made the Assembly offer slaves only an abridged version of the metropolitan ideal.

In what ways did a formal slave marriage undermine the planters' exercise of discipline? First of all, it gave slaves an identity other than slave. It was a legal contract (the only one that slaves could engage in) that presupposed some degree of individual autonomy and rights.<sup>51</sup> Through the exchange of obedience and protection, marriage affirmed the individuality and humanity of the slaves. Secondly, the promise to protect or obey their partner threatened to divide the slaves' loyalty.

The Assembly's dismissal of the government's proposal to allow Nonconformist missionaries to perform marriages and its rejection of a bill with the same view put forward by planter Henry Shirley in 1831, shows that it was not only formal marriages that were perceived as a threat to stability. The 1831 bill was dismissed on the grounds that it 'would give the missionaries too much power over the Negroes.'<sup>52</sup> The latter referred to the fact that Nonconformist missionaries introduced the slaves to new activities, skills and organisational forms that not only attributed them with humanity but also encouraged them to claim new rights and privileges on the plantation and hence diminished their loyalty to their owner.<sup>53</sup>

In spite of such strong rhetoric, not much was done by the planting class to prevent an increase in Nonconformist marriages other than the rejection of Shirley's

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<sup>51</sup> Marriage is a social contract which constitutes both freedom and domination: the partners voluntarily subject themselves to the state and civil law and obtain protection in return for their obedience. For more information on marriage as a means to bestow individuality and humanity, see C. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988; reprint, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 39-40, 62 and 76.

<sup>52</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 306-07. The Assembly members who rejected this bill covered their interest in stability among others by arguing that only the government at home had the authority to enact such a bill. They presumably meant that the law regarding slave marriage should follow the Marriage Act of the mother country. Only in 1837, a law was adopted in Britain that legalised marriages performed by Nonconformist clergymen. As the Assembly enacted various measures, which did not follow those of the mother country, such as their legislation to curb missionary activity, there does not seem to have been a formal obstacle to adopt Shirley's bill.

bill and making it more difficult for Nonconformist missionaries to preach, especially after the 1831-32 rebellion. A possible explanation for the planters' inactivity is that they thought that the benefits of a Nonconformist marriage outweighed the threat it posed to the stability of the estates.<sup>54</sup> Most Nonconformist churches closely supervised the marital lives of their members. They constantly tested them on their ability to live moral Christian lives and easily expelled those who did not live up to their standards of marital chastity. Presbyterians and Moravians, for instance, expelled three to four per cent on account of adultery each year.<sup>55</sup> The diaries of Moravian missionaries provide an excellent insight in the disciplinary sessions of Nonconformist churches. A missionary located at Fairfield wrote in July 1829 that

Brother Ellis was obliged to speak very sharply to our servant George. He and his wife had not lived happily together for some months back, and only two days after a quarrel was settled between them, when George promised to make up and live peacefully with her but last night we heard that he was gone to a neighbouring property with a strange woman which he did not deny this morning. Brother Ellis reproved him very severely for his shameful conduct.<sup>56</sup>

It seems that many planters welcomed such close supervision of slaves' marital lives, not only because it facilitated natural increase but also because it led to more stability. Henry Shirley, for instance, supported his bill with the argument that slaves married by Nonconformist missionaries were among the 'best conducted' slaves on an estate.<sup>57</sup> Another factor that made Nonconformist marriages relatively acceptable for the planters is that the missionaries did not emphasise the importance of co-residence.

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<sup>53</sup> Because of their 'revolutionary' potential, missionaries were until 1828 required to obtain a license to preach from either a local magistrate, planter or attorney. See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 75 and 83.

<sup>54</sup> Another possible explanation, especially after 1807, is the demand from both abolitionists and the West India Committee to encourage the religious instruction of the slaves.

<sup>55</sup> Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 83.

<sup>56</sup> Diary Fairfield 1829, Jamaica Archives, Moravian Archives, Fairfield Q-9.

<sup>57</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 306.

They were simply interested to see their congregation members maintain stable and monogamous unions.<sup>58</sup>

It was, however, not only a concern about stability and economic considerations that made the Jamaican planting class reluctant to encourage slave marriage. Practical considerations also played a role. It saw no need to legislate on the subject of slave marriage because it thought it was impossible to give the institution proper effect under a state of slavery.<sup>59</sup> As argued in the previous chapter, a formal marriage also diminished the legitimate avenues of white Jamaican men to accommodate their sexual needs.<sup>60</sup> Finally, a formal marriage made it more difficult for planters to sell their slaves or hire one of the partners out. As the marriage contract had the status of a natural and god-sanctioned bond, many planters felt guilty and ashamed to separate a married couple. They experienced, however, no guilt or shame to separate cohabiting couples or those married by Nonconformist missionaries. A Moravian missionary mentioned, for instance, in October 1831:

We were very sorry to hear that a negro who had been lately married to a woman from another property was taken for his master's debts and was likely to be sold and would perhaps be purchased by a distant person, and be thus separated from his wife.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 369; and Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> This argument was often put forward to explain the fact that until 1827 the slave law was silent on the issue of slave marriage. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 641.

<sup>60</sup> In the metropolitan society at the time, a man who committed adultery with a married woman could expect less indulgence for his infidelity than a married man who had sex with a single woman or a

### A Beneficial or Harmful Institution?

Under the 1833 Abolition Act, apprentices gained the right to be married by an Anglican clergyman 'without check or prohibition'. The Act not only removed one of the major obstacles to marriage - the planter's permission - but also gave married couples the same rights and duties as married couples in England. Clause X, for instance, guaranteed the co-residence of married couples by forbidding planters to separate families.<sup>62</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the ex-slaves rushed to obtain this expression of freedom. The House of Assembly estimated that between July 1834 and July 1835 a total of 1,724 formal marriages were performed in the island.<sup>63</sup>

The planting class felt extremely threatened by this increase in the marital rate and actively tried to keep the number of marriages low. For instance, in October 1836 the 'colonialist' S.M. Gregg put forward a bill to allow couples with children only to marry if the man could prove that he had sufficient means to support his family.<sup>64</sup> Another method adopted was to combat attempts to legalise Nonconformist marriages. In December 1835, the Assembly rejected another bill to achieve this end.<sup>65</sup> It was, however, not only the number of marriages that worried the planters. They were also and even more concerned about the extension of the conjugal rights

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woman who fell beyond the pale of womanhood, such as a prostitute. See J. Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, 2d ed. (London: Longman, 1993), 24.

<sup>61</sup> Diary Springvale 1831, Jamaica Archives, Moravian Archives, Fairfield H-6.

<sup>62</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 407. The clause forbade both the selling and hiring out of individual members of a family. This was a clear improvement of clause V of the *1826 Slave Law* that only forbade the separation of families in case of a levy.

<sup>63</sup> Minutes of the House of Assembly 15 December 1835, PRO, C.O. 140/126. Among these were many couples who had long lived together. During the Apprenticeship System, marriage was no longer the only social contract that provided some degree of freedom and equality. Another important contract that apprentices availed themselves of in large numbers was the employment contract. They hired themselves out to masters, often other than their own, during their free time. This is another indication that the ex-slaves embraced every bit of freedom that the Abolition Act offered them. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 271.

<sup>64</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 200.



and duties which diminished their control over the labour force and hence affected their status in the island. Planters, therefore, did their utmost to prevent married couples from exercising their newly acquired conjugal rights and duties. The following chapter examines in detail how planters, with the help of the House of Assembly and several S.M.s, tried to prevent co-residence. Economic self-interest, however, made them at the same time demand that apprentices, especially the men, should be legally forced to exercise particular conjugal duties.

It seems as if the discourse that sustained the practices regarding marriage differed little from that during the period of slavery. All the colonialists stated firmly that the Abolition Act had not changed the nature of relationships; they were as unstable and promiscuous as before 1834. However, this argument was used by different groups of colonialists for different purposes. There was, on the one hand, a small group of colonialists who supported the Apprenticeship System. They were of the opinion that their economic and other interests depended on the successful transformation of the ex-slaves into free labourers. They agreed with the abolitionists that apprentices had the right to obtain a fully legal marriage and that they possessed the ability to maintain monogamous, indissoluble, and co-resident unions. Their descriptions of promiscuous marriages mirror the following by S.M. Baynes:

The same addiction to polygamy and promiscuous sexual intercourse, the same licentious practices still prevail. It is true that marriages are more frequent, but they are not deemed by either party as an obstacle to, or at all incompatible with extensive concubinage. Some times, indeed, but not always the lawful wife is considered the head of the household.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Minutes of the House of Assembly 15 December 1835, PRO, C.O. 140/126. The following chapter shows that the government at home also exerted pressure on the Assembly to legalise dissenting marriages.

<sup>66</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 378. See also his report of March 1835 in *PP* 1835, vol. L, 367.

Descriptions such as these served primarily to convince the opponents of the government's emancipation policy to facilitate the workings of the Apprenticeship System by instructing the ex-slaves in the rights and duties associated with marriage and by not putting any obstacles in their way of carrying these out. Baynes himself tried to facilitate this goal by setting up the *West Indian* in January 1838. Like the penny magazines in the mother country, this paper served to 'spread useful knowledge' to the ex-slaves, including that on marriage.<sup>67</sup>

It was especially their descriptions of the apprentices' domestic life that had to convince their fellow colonialists that the apprentices were capable of maintaining stable and monogamous unions and hence that programmes of instruction would pay off. One proprietor used his female apprentices' remark that 'their husbands must support them' as evidence that apprenticed couples had begun to adopt an important attribute of the metropolitan ideal of marriage: gendered spheres of activity and authority.<sup>68</sup>

It was primarily economic-self interest that made these 'enlightened' colonialists demand that no obstacles were put in the way of apprentices to marry and that their marriage conformed closely to that in the metropolitan society. The above-mentioned planter, for instance, acknowledged his apprentices' conjugal rights (e.g. by allowing cross-plantation partners to visit one another without written permission) in order to secure their labour upon full freedom.<sup>69</sup> Planter Henry Shirley wanted more of his apprentices to marry in order to create a stable environment conducive to

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<sup>67</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 273-74.

<sup>68</sup> *An Address to Her Majesty's Ministers, the West India Proprietors, Dissenters and Abolitionists, on the Premature Termination of the Negro Apprenticeship and on Its Probable Consequences to This Country and to the Proprietors and Labourers by a West India Proprietor* (n.p., 1838), 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. There was a widespread concern among planters at the inception of the Apprenticeship System that few negroes would be available for estate work after the end of the Apprenticeship. While 'enlightened' colonialists favoured good treatment of the apprentices as a means to ensure a future supply of labour, hard-line colonialists looked towards (white) immigration. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 290.

high productivity.<sup>70</sup> Economic interests informed even the attitude of non-planters like Baynes, who had no direct interest in apprentice labour. These middle-class men, mostly professionals, saw stable and monogamous unions as a means to ensure that the plantations remained operative in the long run and hence that their own wealth and status was safeguarded.<sup>71</sup>

The majority of the colonialists strongly disapproved of the Apprenticeship System. It is thus not surprising that they presented far more dramatic accounts of promiscuous and unstable marriages. The *Kingston Chronicle*, which represented their opinions, regularly informed its readers that little had changed with regard to marriage:

Almost every black and brown man has a plurality of wives - that to support these concubines in dress and extravagances, the apprentices plunder their masters to a great extent . . . even the married Methodists are any thing but true to their vows.<sup>72</sup>

Such remarks had to support their claim that the Apprenticeship System was a mistake and doomed to failure. The apprentices' inability to maintain stable and monogamous relations was seen as an indication of their inability to carry out their part of the Apprenticeship contract; that is, 'to work honestly, to refrain from insolence and insubordination, and to eschew all efforts to escape from the performance of the contract.'<sup>73</sup> Accounts of domestic discord conveyed the same idea. S.M.s who disapproved of the government's emancipation policy lamented the fact that apprenticed women did not exercise their domestic duties, in particular that of

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<sup>70</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 306.

<sup>71</sup> It was especially from among the non-planter middle class that S.M.s were drawn. As they had no direct interest in apprenticed labour it was hoped that they would exercise their duties in an impartial way. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 200.

<sup>72</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 7 September 1835. This newspaper, with 55 subscribers, represented a fairly moderate but consistent opposition to the government's policy. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 273.

looking after their children's material needs. They generally blamed the 'reputed husbands' for this state of affairs. When they no longer fancied their wives, they left them without taking responsibility for the children. The woman was most often portrayed as a suffering victim who was forced to undertake the 'unwomanly' task of supporting her illegitimate offspring. S.M. Dillon, for example, informed governor Sligo in June 1836 that 'the mother is usually obliged to support the child and children, and the magistrate can yield her but little redress.'<sup>74</sup>

The image of the innocent, suffering mother of illegitimate children also underlay the earlier-mentioned bill to only allow couples to marry if the man could show that he had ample means to provide for his family. S.M. Gregg's justification for the bill suggests that the concern of the hard-line colonialists about the marriage of apprentices was not only driven by a perceived loss of power but also by sheer (long-term) economic interests:

To protect an innocent offspring from starvation, through the barbarity of an *unnatural father* [emphasis mine] . . . This, I am of the opinion, can only be done by declaring them as legal legitimate children, and as such entitled to a part of the father's estate. Should this not be done, I fear many poor mothers will be left to provide for a young family, and which must ultimately become paupers on the parish'.<sup>75</sup>

In other words, the burden for the support of illegitimate children should in the future not fall on the parish. Gregg's bill articulates above all the fears of the non-planting class in the island. Planters had an even more direct and short-term interest in assuring that apprenticed husbands exercised their 'natural' gender role as provider. Since the children under six were legally free and would not automatically work for them in the

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<sup>73</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 119.

<sup>74</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 69. The fact that he usually accepted the statements of masters in cases of disputes between apprentices and masters had gained Dillon the reputation of a 'strong' S.M. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 259.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

future, they did not want to provide them with food, clothing, medicine, and so on. It was their interests, which led S.M. Dillon to ask governor Sligo to adopt a modified version of the English law which 'compels a father to support his offspring.' Knowing that the governor was keen to defend the interests of the apprentices, he presented the law as benefiting first and foremost the female apprentices:

Could not the English law . . . be so modified or suited to our position to give relief to a female of this class? It would, I apprehend, be received as an act of humanity towards the mother and child, and justice towards the proprietor.<sup>76</sup>

This suggestion and the bill proposed by S.M. Gregg drew upon the metropolitan debate about the poor law. The 1832 commission inquiring into the operation of the poor law in England and Wales was extremely concerned about the 'support of illegitimate children, the relief afforded to their mothers, and the attempts to obtain the repayment of the expense from their supposed fathers.' The laws on bastardy stipulated that in case a reputed father refused to pay the sum ordered by the magistrate for the upkeep of his child (for instance, by moving to a part of the country where he was unknown) the parish was required to pay its mother an allowance. The commission argued that the sum given to the mother was so generous, far exceeding that of mothers with legitimate children, that it encouraged rather than restricted them to have more children out of wedlock. It was suggested that this 'crime' could be remedied by adopting measures that made it more difficult for putative fathers to avoid paying the sum charged on them and by giving the mothers relief in a well-regulated workhouse where they would be set to work rather than at their homes.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>77</sup> S. G. and E. O. A. Checkland, eds., *The Poor Law Report of 1834* (London: Penguin, 1974), 258-62. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act went some way towards incorporating these suggestions. It stipulated that poor law officers should undertake proceedings against a reputed father. In case these failed to have an effect, the mother should be given immediate relief, which was to be given in the workhouse if she was able-bodied.

The various reactions to the change in the marriage law demonstrate that during the Apprenticeship System monogamy and permanency were still seen as the main attributes of marriage and looking after the children's material needs as the wife's main conjugal duty and providing that of the husband. Some colonialists, however, began in this period to articulate a notion of marriage that centred on the home. They were of the opinion that the change that had taken place in the power relations in the island required the full version of the metropolitan ideal of marriage in order to secure the economic and other interests of white Jamaican society.

### **Conclusions**

The opinion expressed by non-resident colonialists in the late eighteenth century that slave marriage would go some way towards solving the planters' problems of natural decrease, stability and productivity was not widely shared. Most colonialists were of the opinion that slave marriage aggravated these problems. To rationalise the lack of measures to encourage slaves to marry, they provided accounts of slave domestic life that conveyed the message that slaves were perfectly able to carry out their most important gender roles without the legal sanction of their union. Abolitionist and government pressure, however, changed their attitude towards slave marriage. From mid-1820s onwards, they began to advocate a slave marriage which had been favoured by non-residents in the late eighteenth century. This was an abridged version of the metropolitan ideal of marriage. It incorporated the attributes of monogamy, permanency and distinct and complementary roles for husband and wife, but omitted

those that were considered harmful for the planters: co-residence, gendered spheres of activity and full legal protection.

Also within the debate about slave marriage and domesticity, different groups of colonialists jostled for power. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was non-residents versus residents, while during the period 1834-1838 residents in favour of the Apprenticeship battled against those who strongly disapproved of this transitional stage between slavery and full freedom. The first of each oppositional group considered black Jamaicans as capable of carrying out the rights and duties associated with the limited version of the metropolitan ideal, while the second expressed the opinion that they were not predisposed to matrimony. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, all colonialists simultaneously expressed these opinions. The contradictory nature of the colonialist debate in this period was to some extent the result of abolitionist accusations that planters were uncivilised and inhumane. It also stemmed from the fact that formal marriages were considered harmful for the planters because of economic and practical considerations as well as their connotation of freedom and equality, while non-legal, stable and monogamous unions were regarded as beneficial. The debate was sustained by the image of the slave woman as a 'capable homemaker'. A more dominant image, however, was that of the slave man who failed to exercise his role as household head: he did not provide for his dependants and lacked any sense of affection for them. The latter also played a prominent role during the Apprenticeship System when it was used, alongside the image of the apprenticed woman as an 'incapable homemaker', to rationalise interventions in the marital life of apprentices.

Not only the debate but also the actual practices regarding marriage changed between 1780 and 1838. A shift took place in the mid-1820s when official

encouragement was given to formal slave marriage. A second change occurred after August 1834 when attempts were made to limit the number of formal marriages and prevent couples from exercising their conjugal rights. The latter was the result of a change in the status of formal marriage. It was no longer a semi-legal, semi-voluntary contract between the planter, the couple and the state but a fully voluntary and legal contract between the couple and the state. In other words, formal marriage was a means through which apprentices could give expression to the change in their status from chattels to free persons. As the planters' social position depended on their workers' status as chattels, they tried to prevent an increase in the marital rate and obstructed couples in the exercise of their conjugal duties.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SLAVE MARRIAGE: THE FOUNDATIONS OF FREEDOM**

Abolitionists regarded slave marriage as an important building block of their future free Jamaica. They were convinced that if slave marriage mirrored that in the metropolitan society, it would not only diminish the immorality in the island but also inculcate the slaves with virtues, such as industry and soberness, that were needed to turn the island into a capitalist, free labour economy. Hence, they came up with various proposals to increase the marital rate and make the institution conform to the metropolitan ideal. The first section examines the proposals put forward in the period 1780-1834, while the second looks at those presented during the Apprenticeship System. The final section summarises the main changes in the abolitionist debate, examines the effect of the numerous accounts that served to demonstrate the slaves' desire and ability to marry, and mentions the main similarities and differences between the abolitionist and colonialist debate about slave marriage.

#### **Marriage as the Preparation for Freedom**

Slave marriage did not occupy a major role in abolitionist discourse prior to the abolition of the slave trade. The few abolitionists who addressed it were concerned to show that planters did nothing to promote and regularise marriage. Their criticisms were based on the assumption that slave marriage held out great benefits not only for the slaves but also for the whole of Jamaican society, including the planting class.

Rev. James Ramsay mentioned in 1784 that it would 'humanise' the slaves and improve their condition as

marriage, or a family, is the embryo of society; it contains the principles, and seeds of every social virtue. The care of a family would make them more considerate, sober, frugal, and industrious.<sup>1</sup>

Edmund Burke went even further by arguing that marriage and the family prepared the slaves for freedom.<sup>2</sup> Both men were of the opinion that slave marriage could only fulfil these roles if planters adopted measures to make it conform closely to the metropolitan norm. Ramsay was especially appalled by the fact that planters allowed married slaves to have multiple partners and that they did nothing to prevent 'divorce'.<sup>3</sup> Burke proposed various laws to correct these and other shortcomings in the existing slave marriage, such as a law that gave Anglican clergymen the right to 'punish all acts of adultery, unlawful concubinage and fornication' and another that forbade planters to sell married couples separately and forced them not to sell couples belonging to different masters 'at such a distance to prevent mutual help and cohabitation'.<sup>4</sup> To encourage this better regulated marriage, he suggested first of all that it should be made easier for couples to obtain a formal marriage. Baptism in the established church should, in his opinion, not be the only criterion to qualify for marriage. Non-baptised couples who had lived together for at least one year and slaves belonging to Nonconformist churches should also be allowed to marry legally. Like some colonialists, he also proposed a marriage reward system. Slaves should be

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsay, *Essay on the Conversion*, 243.

<sup>2</sup> Burke, *Sketch of the Negro Code*, 202. Burke supported Wilberforce's 1789 and 1791 motions for the abolition of the slave trade. In this pamphlet he argued that a better-regulated trade and institution of slavery would lead to its eventual abolition. This change in opinion should be seen within the light of the revolution in France, which caused moral panic in Britain. See Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 142 and 148.

<sup>3</sup> Ramsay, *Essay on the Conversion*, 243.

given three days off from work after their marriage in addition to a plot of land and materials to build a hut. Finally, he suggested that planters should force marriage upon their slaves. Unmarried men between 21 and 50 should, according to Burke, be provided with a wife. Refusal to marry the allocated woman 'publicly in the face of the Church' was to be punished with a heavier workload and a reduction in the customary allowances of food and clothing.<sup>5</sup>

For Burke, indissolubility, monogamy and co-residence were the key attributes of slave marriage. These attributes also feature prominently in other early abolitionist writings. They are often articulated alongside another important attribute, which was also derived from the metropolitan ideal of marriage: gendered spheres of activity and authority. This attribute occupied a central role in abolitionist fiction and public speeches. Maria Edgeworth's novel *The Grateful Negro* (1804) relates the attempts of Caesar and Clara to prevent their announced separation and avert a slave conspiracy. Caesar is firmly placed on the provision ground (which he cultivated to 'a degree of perfection nowhere to be seen on the estate') and is presented as the provider of the household. Clara, on the other hand, is located in the couple's hut that Caesar had tried to make into 'an agreeable habitation'. Her conjugal duties consist first and foremost of supporting her husband. This comes most clearly to the fore in the couple's discussion whether or not Caesar should take part in a slave rebellion organised by his friend Hector and the obeah woman Esther. Caesar told Clara to think of 'his honour' and tell Esther that he would not take part. As a proper wife, Clara obeyed her husband's wish and informed Esther of his decision.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Burke, *Sketch of the Negro Code*, 203.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 202-203 and 205.

<sup>6</sup> M. Edgeworth, *The Grateful Negro* (London, 1804) as reprinted in Aravamudan, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, 295-325.

Edgeworth was a conservative abolitionist whose main aim was to show that plantocratic paternalism and reciprocal gratitude by slaves was the preferred solution to the problem of slavery within a context of massive slave insurrections in the West Indies.<sup>7</sup> She could only convey this message by portraying Caesar and Clara as a very virtuous couple. As virtue was synonymous with domesticity, she located Clara firmly in the home, clothing her with attributes of the middle-class homemaker, while ignoring her formal and informal economic roles. At no point did she refer to Clara's work in the field for her master, nor did she locate her on the provision ground. Recent research into the slaves' informal economy has shown that male slaves cleared the provision ground for cultivation; that during the weekend husband, wife and children worked the ground; and that it was usually the women who marketed the surplus produce on the Sunday market.<sup>8</sup> James Anderson was also concerned to show that slaves were able to exercise their conjugal duties. He told a Manchester audience in 1789 that once freed, a slave man would not only do his utmost to provide his family with sustenance by renting some land but would also do everything possible to buy his wife's freedom in order to marry her and hence make their offspring legitimate.<sup>9</sup>

Most abolitionists assumed that the abolition of the slave trade would force planters to encourage formal slave marriage and supervise it more closely. For instance, Thomas Clarkson mentioned in 1788 that abolition would see many slaves

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<sup>7</sup> The novel was published when the 1791 slave rebellion in St Domingue was still fresh in the public's mind.

<sup>8</sup> A good introduction to the slaves' informal economy is Berlin and Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture*. Slave women's public roles as cultivators and marketers held substantial benefits for them. The first provided them with food for their families; gave them an identity other than as slaves; and enabled them to spend time with their family and friends. The latter offered them a chance to meet up with women from other estates and as such pass on important information among slaves. See Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World*, 59-60; and Beckles, *Natural Rebels*, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *Observations*, 19. A marriage between two freed slaves had the same legal status as that between two white Jamaicans.

'legally engaging in the bonds of connubial happiness.'<sup>10</sup> When this situation failed to arise, the abolitionist discussion on slave marriage increased, while shifting its focus from the question, How could slave marriage be increased and better regulated? to How legal was a formal slave marriage? This shift was accompanied by a far more radical rhetorical attack on the planting class. There was, however, also much continuity in the abolitionist debate in the 1820s and early 1830s. It remained based on the assumption that a church-sanctioned slave marriage formed the building block of the future free society. William Wilberforce mentioned in 1823 that

no attempts have been made to introduce among them the Christian institution of marriage, that blessed union which the Almighty himself established as a fundamental law, at the creation of man, to be as it were the well-spring of all the charities of life - the source of all domestic comfort and social improvement - the moral cement of civilized society.<sup>11</sup>

Abolitionists continued furthermore to try to convince their readers of the slaves' desire and ability to enter into a marriage that mirrored the metropolitan ideal. The desire to marry was primarily conveyed through accounts of manumitted slave men who wanted to purchase their partner's freedom in order to obtain a fully legal marriage.<sup>12</sup> The slaves' ability was first of all expressed through descriptions of slave couples, married or not, who lived up to the attributes of the metropolitan ideal. For instance, the unmarried couple Afiba and Quante in the novel *The Koromantyn Slaves* maintained a stable and monogamous union:

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<sup>10</sup> Clarkson, *Essay on the Impolicy*, 100.

<sup>11</sup> Wilberforce, *Appeal to the Religion*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Bickell, *The West Indies as They Are*, 33-34; H. Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery* (London, 1853), 90; and the statements of William Taylor and William Knibb in *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 18 and 284.

They had formed the natural attachment of two young hearts possessed of warm affections; their religious instruction, and the genuine reception of its principles had preserved the constancy of each.<sup>13</sup>

It was also conveyed through more 'scientific' accounts. The politician G. H. Rose mentioned, for example, that as adultery was punished in West African societies, the slaves had carried with them 'the knowledge of the institution of marriage, respect for its holiness, and fear of polluting it.'<sup>14</sup>

Much more than in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was slave marriage linked to the home. Field labour was increasingly presented as incompatible with slave women's conjugal duties. Rev. Thomas Cooper mentioned in his *Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica* that

the negress is expected to work in the gang all day, and no one seems to have any idea that any part of her time ought, in reason, to be devoted to the concern of her household.<sup>15</sup>

Abolitionists, however, no longer ignored slave women's work on the provision grounds. Rev. Richard Bickell, who had worked in the island for five years, told his readers that

females have portions of land as well as the men, and provide for themselves, when single, but when married or living constantly with a man, they often unite their grounds, and conjointly labour for themselves and their families.<sup>16</sup>

This stepping out of the proper sphere was not criticised but appreciated as it was undertaken with a view to promote the domestic comfort of the family. Abolitionists

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<sup>13</sup> *The Koromantyn Slaves*, 166.

<sup>14</sup> G. H. Rose, *A Letter on the Means and Importance of Converting the Slaves in the West Indies to Christianity* (London, 1823), 32.

<sup>15</sup> Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 33. For similar remarks, see *Plan for Effecting*, 5; and J. Stephen, *The Slavery of the British west India Colonies Delineated*, 2 vols. (London, 1824), 2: 97.

regarded it in the same way as paid work of working-class women in their own society; namely, as a necessary but temporary evil.<sup>17</sup> This idea was most clearly expressed in the 1824 plan for gradual emancipation mentioned in chapter two. It suggested that until slave men were manumitted and hence able to provide for their families, slave women should attend to the 'concerns of the family, in going to the market and in cultivating provisions.'<sup>18</sup> To convince their readers that the women would give up their informal economic roles and withdraw to their proper sphere upon freedom, abolitionists pointed out that slave women generally spent their 'spare time' doing domestic chores. William Taylor, an anti-slavery witness before the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery, mentioned that women spent their lunch break 'in their household matters', while slave men attended the vegetable gardens.<sup>19</sup> In other words, abolitionists represented slave women in the 1820s and early 1830s as home-centred by nature.

It is also in the debate about slave marriage that one can detect the abolitionists' shift away from appeasement. While a few abolitionists tried to convince planters of the benefits of slave marriage by arguing that it would lead to natural increase and stability, the majority severely attacked them for obstructing an increase in formal slave marriage and not making the institution conform to the metropolitan ideal.<sup>20</sup> Clause IV of 1826 Slave Law had, in their opinion, not led to a substantial increase in marriages because many planters continued to withhold their written

<sup>16</sup> Bickell, *The West Indies as They Are*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> The metropolitan discourse on marriage represented working wives and mothers as unnatural and immoral. It stipulated that if married women were to undertake paid employment in order to support their families, they should work in homes rather than in factories or mines. See Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, 91-92.

<sup>18</sup> *Plan for Effecting*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 39. Taylor had lived in Jamaica as a merchant and manager of plantations.

<sup>20</sup> The following pamphlets tried to appease the planters: Wilberforce, *Appeal to the Religion*, 20; Rose, *Letter on the Means*, 31; and *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery Consistently with the Interests of All Parties Concerned* (London, 1828), 19.

permission.<sup>21</sup> Some abolitionists tried to explain the planters' attitude. According to former resident Henry Bleby, it was caused by economic self-interest. He mentioned that William Baillie's owner had refused to give him permission to marry a free woman because 'the offspring of such a marriage would be free, and consequently unprofitable to the estate.'<sup>22</sup> Rev. Peter Duncan, on the other hand, argued that it was their sexual needs that made planters refuse to give permission. He told the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery that planters often told slaves who desired to marry that they 'may live as I am living myself', that is promiscuously.<sup>23</sup>

Abolitionists also associated the problem of low marital rates with that of the flogging of slave women. It was argued that slave men preferred cohabitation to marriage if they knew that their wife could at any time be indecently exposed and flogged in front of a large congregation of slaves and estate officers. William Taylor, for instance, told the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery that 'a negro would not marry because he could not endure that his wedded wife would be flogged.'<sup>24</sup> Remarks such as these served first of all to show how much slaves respected and understood the marriage contract. Or, in the words of a Jamaican missionary: 'With whatever indifference they may regard the degradation of a concubine, we know that they look with horror on the degradation of a wife.'<sup>25</sup> They also had to convince the readers that the slave community adhered to a notion of female chastity and purity; and hence, that with full freedom the women would be able to exercise their role as 'moral regenerators'.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, [Trew], *Nine Letters*, 39; and PP 1831-32, vol. XX, 157.

<sup>22</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles*, 90.

<sup>23</sup> PP 1831-32, vol. XX, 157.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Rev. John Jenkins cited in G. Jackson, *A Memoir of the Rev. John Jenkins Late a Wesleyan Missionary in the Island of Jamaica*, 2d ed. (London, n.y.), 120.



The low marital rate was furthermore attributed to the fact that married couples could easily be separated.<sup>26</sup> Clause V of the 1826 Slave Law which made it illegal for planters to separate a slave family in case of the owner's debt was strongly criticised because it did not relate to cross-plantation couples. It was argued that this omission prevented many such couples from entering upon a formal or even a Nonconformist marriage. A Moravian missionary mentioned, for instance, that two members of his congregation had refused to marry because one man's partner 'had been removed to the distance of 20 miles' and the other's was hired out and 'might sooner than later be removed still farther.'<sup>27</sup> The criticism of clause V should not obscure the fact that abolitionists strongly disapproved of cross-plantation marriages because the husband could not act as a proper household head. Living on another estate prevented him not only from providing for his family but also from protecting his dependants:

He leaves them to the control of others whose conduct he cannot superintend, and who from the corrupting influence of the state of society in which they live and from other circumstances are peculiarly liable to abuse.<sup>28</sup>

Many abolitionists conveyed the hardships of cross-plantation couples. They tried to show that in spite of all the difficulties, husband and wife tried to exercise their conjugal duties. For instance, in 1830 the audience at a meeting of the Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of Slavery was told about a slave woman who had run away to her husband in order to escape the flogging and other physical abuse she continuously received. According to the speaker, white society in the island regarded

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<sup>26</sup> See, among others, Godwin, *Lectures on Colonial Slavery*, 53; Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 9; and *Speech of James Losh*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Diary of Fairfield 1829, Jamaica Archives, Moravian Archives, Fairfield Q-9. See also the response of the Secretary of State to the 1826 Slave Law in *PP* 1828, vol. XXVII, 100.

<sup>28</sup> *Dialogue between a Well-Wisher*, 9.

this couple's attempt to carry out their conjugal duties as a 'crime'.<sup>29</sup> Such accounts of domestic unhappiness were often followed by demands for an enactment to facilitate the co-residence of cross-plantation couples.<sup>30</sup> Together, they expressed the idea that co-residence was a requisite for the exercise of conjugal duties. This emphasis on co-residence is another indication that by the late 1820s abolitionists firmly linked slave marriage to the home. It can also be deduced from the following suggestion to increase slave marriages: 'If [the women's] exemption from compulsory labour were connected with marriage, it would render the desire of that institution universal among them.'<sup>31</sup>

Various other solutions were put forward to combat the problem of low marital rates. As mentioned above, laws were proposed to prevent the separation of married couples, to facilitate co-residence, and to ban female flogging. Evangelical abolitionists and missionaries furthermore suggested religious instruction as a means to end 'unlawful concubinage'.<sup>32</sup> And a former resident reiterated the proposal put forward by the Secretary of State in 1798 to tax planters more for single slaves.<sup>33</sup> No abolitionist, however, proposed a marriage reward scheme. This omission reflects a change in the abolitionist conception of the equality of the slaves. We have seen in chapter three that notions of racial hierarchy permeated some early abolitionist writings: black slaves were seen as less human than coloured slaves. Ramsay's and Burke's remarks about slave marriage were also based on a notion of racial hierarchy: whites were seen as superior to blacks.<sup>34</sup> As they doubted the slaves' natural ability to

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<sup>29</sup> A. Thomson, *Substance of the Speech Delivered at the Meeting of the Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of slavery on October 19 1830* (Edinburgh, 1830), 7.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, *Address to the Public*, 9; and Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Plan for Effecting*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, the statements of the missionaries Barry and Duncan in *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 102 and 112.

<sup>33</sup> *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Their belief in white superiority went hand in hand with the belief that abolition of the slave trade would bring the slaves closer to the white race. For more information on racism in early abolitionist

enter into a stable and monogamous marriage, they put forward proposals to induce or even force them into such a union. The fact that the above-mentioned proposals to increase the marital rate lay the responsibility with the planters and not with the slaves, demonstrates that by the mid-1820s abolitionists firmly regarded slaves as full and equal members of the human race.

Also absent were proposals to increase the marital rate by allowing dissenting missionaries to perform slave marriages. In fact, abolitionists firmly upheld the practice of acknowledging only Church of England marriages as valid in law. Methodist missionaries, for instance, strongly encouraged their congregation to obtain a formal marriage.<sup>35</sup> Abolitionists favoured a formal marriage over a Nonconformist marriage because of its association with freedom and equality. Formal slave marriage was a veiled social contract. The notion of social contract was based on the assumption that only individuals had the capacity to enter a contract and that the partners in the contract (those who exchange obedience in return for protection) were equals. The purpose of a social contract was to secure and enhance individual freedom.<sup>36</sup> Thus, when a slave entered upon a formal marriage his humanity and equality was formally acknowledged and his conjugal rights were given at least some degree of protection.<sup>37</sup>

That legality was an important attribute of the abolitionist ideal of slave marriage can also be deduced from the discussion about marriages between freedmen and slaves.<sup>38</sup> In the late 1820s, most freedmen followed the script envisioned by

writings, see Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 155-56; and Kitson, "Bales of Living Anguish".

<sup>35</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 157.

<sup>36</sup> On social contracts, see M. Lessnoff, *Social Contract* (London: Macmillan, 1986). On the marriage contract see Pateman, *Sexual Contract*.

<sup>37</sup> The protection was not laid down in the Slave Law. In practice, however, married slaves were less likely to be separated and married wives ran less the risk of sexual abuse and flogging.

<sup>38</sup> This discussion reflects the increased concern of abolitionists about the citizenship rights of freedmen in the late 1820s. The freedmen's right to have a proper legal marriage and exercise all the

James Anderson in 1789. They desired to buy their partner's freedom before marrying them in an Anglican church. This ensured the freedom of their offspring as children followed the condition of the mother. It also guaranteed their legitimacy as a formal marriage between two freedmen was a proper legal marriage, that is it provided the couple with the same rights and privileges as married couples in the metropolitan society.<sup>39</sup> In most instances, however, planters set such a high price that very few freedmen were able to purchase their partner's freedom. As a result, most couples continued to cohabit or opted for a formal slave marriage and their children remained not only slaves but also 'bastards'.<sup>40</sup> The abolitionists' outrage about this state of affairs and their demand for fairer valuations, demonstrate their conviction that slavery corrupted all members of Jamaican society.<sup>41</sup> Planters prevented, in their opinion, freedmen as much as slave men from acting as proper household heads. They could neither exercise full authority over their dependants nor protect them. They also failed to sufficiently provide for them as their marriage was not fully legal and hence they could not bequeath property to their offspring.<sup>42</sup> This idea was also expressed in their concern about the fact that freed-enslaved couples were unable to live under the same roof as planters often forced freedmen to pay a rent in order to live in their partner's hut.<sup>43</sup>

rights and duties associated with it, was as important for the abolitionists as their political rights. See Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 426.

<sup>39</sup> A marriage between a freedman and a slave fell under clause IV of the 1826 Slave Law. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 641.

<sup>40</sup> Bickell, *The West Indies as They Are*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 284. Those in favour of gradual emancipation were especially enraged about the planters' demand for high valuations as it prevented a gradual increase in the freedmen population.

<sup>42</sup> The manipulation and control of property in order to support dependants was an important attribute of the metropolitan notion of manhood. See Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 211.

<sup>43</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 18. The planters' attitude to free-enslaved couples was a response to the growth of the freedman population. The high valuations served to keep the growth within acceptable margins, while the refusal to let a freedman live in his enslaved wife's hut was a means to limit his rights.

We see then that although many abolitionists found the formal slave marriage deviating from the metropolitan ideal, they were keen to see its numbers increasing. It was believed that there was enough in this abridged version of the metropolitan ideal to prepare the slaves for full freedom. A few former missionaries departed from this consensus. They doubted whether the abridged version could bring about a positive change in the slaves' moral behaviour and were extremely reluctant, if not adverse, to encourage the formal slave marriage. Rev. Thomas Cooper expressed this doubt most clearly in his review of Rev. G. W. Bridges' *A Voice from Jamaica* (1823):

But what is the use of mere form? Remove the auctioneer, the driver, and the master, from the doors of the Negroes, and I will admit that they may marry: till then, Mr. Bridges may keep adding to his list without conferring any benefits, worth mentioning, either on the poor creatures or society.<sup>44</sup>

They denounced the formal slave marriage on the grounds that it involved a third party - the planter - whom the couple had to ask permission to marry. They argued that as this third party had the power to separate the union at any time and prevent the partners from adhering to their marriage vows, the formal slave marriage was not fully legal. Their ideal marriage was on the one hand a contract between the husband and wife and a contract between the couple and the state on the other. The contract was to be reciprocal (both parties promised to perform some action in return for another), voluntary and legal. By the latter, they meant protection by and submission to the law.<sup>45</sup> They, for instance, not only demanded a law to prevent the separation of married couples but also a law to prevent slave couples from separating on their own accord:

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<sup>44</sup> Cooper cited in Riland, *Memoirs*, 202.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 200-02; and Rev. G. W. Craufurd cited in Jackson, *Britain's Burden*, 18.

If the woman should think it proper to leave her husband, what redress could he procure? Could he demand her on finding out the place of her retreat? Or, rather, might she not put him at defiance, by simply stating that she wished to be off the bargain? On the other hand, he might serve her the same with perfect impunity.<sup>46</sup>

It needs to be emphasised that this ideal marriage was not based on equality. Like the majority of the abolitionists, these former missionaries presupposed patriarchal right:

Now, in order to this, he must have a fair chance in society: no one must assume and exercise absolute authority over his family. But what is the lot of the slave in this respect? Has he the authority of a parent over his children, or the means of making his cottage the scene of domestic love and happiness?<sup>47</sup>

### **Marriage as the Blessing of Freedom**

In August 1834 formal slave marriage became a voluntary contract between the couple and the state in which the former promised to carry out certain duties and the latter to protect the couple's rights and privileges. The ex-slaves' rush to obtain such a marriage was lauded by the abolitionists, who presented it as an indication that with full freedom in August 1840 Jamaica would become a truly moral and civilised society. S.M. Alexander McLeod mentioned, for example, in July 1836 that

negroes of both sexes evidence a considerable desire to marry, and many hundreds of couples who had long lived in a state of concubinage have recently had themselves united in wedlock.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Cooper cited in Riland, *Memoirs*, 200-01.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>48</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 83. For similar remarks, see *PP* 1835, vol. L, 84; *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 231; and *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 94.

The same idea was conveyed in accounts that demonstrated a move towards domesticity. S.M. Edward Lyon, for instance, praised two male apprentices who had bought their partner's freedom because they 'were desirous that the remainder of their lives should be devoted to the superintendence of the domestic comfort of their families.'<sup>49</sup> Although abolitionists were keen to see that apprenticed women engaged solely in domestic tasks, they did not as in the 1820s and early 1830s propose legislation to withdraw the women from the field. Instead, they favoured a system whereby the husband took responsibility for his wife's domesticity. The abolitionists' reluctance to force apprenticed women into domesticity stemmed from ideological, economic and humanitarian considerations. Abolitionists wanted to free the ex-slaves from arbitrary, personal and physical dominion on the one hand, and promote their self-discipline, individual responsibility and human betterment on the other.<sup>50</sup> To achieve this goal, they appealed to the male apprentices' desire for self-improvement. It was assumed that the men saw the withdrawal of their wives from the field as a status symbol and that they would thus use their free time to raise the money necessary to purchase their freedom. Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey mentioned, for example, that the 'gradual, voluntary withdrawal of women from regular field labour to domestic duties' was essential to the 'happiness and *improvement* [emphasis mine] of the negroes.'<sup>51</sup> As to the economic considerations, abolitionists realised that an immediate and forced withdrawal of women from the field would halve the field labour force. This would lead to a huge decline in output and hence prevent the development of a solid economic foundation for the future free society. Sturge and

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<sup>49</sup> PP 1837, vol. LIII, 217. Lyon, a former Assistant-Collector of Customs at Morant Bay, was one of the few coloured S.M.s. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 202.

<sup>50</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 349. Apprentices could raise money by selling the surplus produce of their provision grounds or hiring themselves out to their own master or another planter. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 271.

Harvey argued, for instance, that gradual and voluntary withdrawal would ensure 'the future, permanent, advancing prosperity of the whole community.'<sup>52</sup> Finally, the planters' attitude towards the children under six led the abolitionists to conclude that they would be most unwilling to provide for free women and that as such immediate and forced withdrawal from the field would do far more harm than good.

Although very pleased with the apprentices' rush into formal marriage, abolitionists wanted to see an even greater increase. First, because they regarded the new marriage as a means for apprentices to give expression to the change in their status from chattels to free persons with legal rights and duties. Secondly, because it bestowed on the apprentices and wider society the benefits mentioned by William Wilberforce and many others during the period of slavery, which were even more important now full freedom loomed large. S.M. John Daughtrey wrote, for instance, in June 1835 that a formal marriage not only 'elevated' the woman and gave the man 'more respect for himself' but also 'removed a bar to their attendance on Divine worship.'<sup>53</sup> At first, abolitionists tried to achieve an increase by appealing to the planters. They urged them to adopt measures that would encourage their apprentices to marry, ranging from lenient visiting arrangements for cross-plantation couples to schemes to prevent white officers from sexually abusing female apprentices.<sup>54</sup> An increase in marriage, it was argued, would benefit their enterprises in the short- and long-term. S.M. Daughtrey told them, for example, that it would secure them with a future supply of labour, as married men were less likely to seek employment elsewhere after the end of the Apprenticeship System, especially if their conjugal

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Attempts were made at the time to find alternative supplies of labour. Of the various schemes that were put before the Colonial Office, only a few were realised. In 1834-35, for instance, 600 German immigrants arrived in the island. Burn, *Emancipation*, 290-91.

<sup>53</sup> *PP* 1835, vol. L, 84. Various denominations excluded cohabiting couples from full church membership. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 644.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, *PP* 1835, vol. L, 153; *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 94; and *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 140.



rights were sufficiently recognised and protected.<sup>55</sup> In addition, S. M. Stephen Bourne tried to convince the planters that if they encouraged 'marriage, not only amongst the apprentices, but overseers and book-keepers, they would most effectually promote their true interests.'<sup>56</sup>

As their appeals to the planting class had little effect, abolitionists began from 1836 onwards to look towards the government for help.<sup>57</sup> They asked for a marriage system that afforded 'greater facilities' and was 'applicable to the whole community' and as such would improve the 'temporal welfare and the moral condition of hundreds of thousands of His Majesty's subjects.'<sup>58</sup> It was argued that apprentices found it extremely difficult to obtain a formal marriage because Nonconformist missionaries were by law not empowered to marry and there was a paucity of Anglican clergymen, especially in the rural parishes.<sup>59</sup> The legalisation of Nonconformist marriages was presented as the best means to deal with this problem. The Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society, Mr. Beecham, was one of the first to launch this proposal.<sup>60</sup> Not surprisingly, he supported it with arguments that demonstrated the civilising influence of marriage and the apprentices' ability to exercise the rights and duties attached to it:

[Under slavery] the negro mind showed itself susceptible of the sacredness of the union which religion had cemented; true conjugal affection was created, parental and filial affection was strengthened; the domestic virtues were elicited, and the negro marriages, generally, were so many benefits conferred upon society at large.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *PP* 1835, vol. L, 84. See also his report from January 1837 in *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 262.

<sup>56</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 94.

<sup>57</sup> On the planters' lack of activity, see *PP* 1835, vol. L, 153; and *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 94.

<sup>58</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 642.

<sup>59</sup> Letter of the committee of the Wesleyan Missionary Society reprinted in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 643-44.

<sup>60</sup> His proposal was the result of incessant demands by resident missionaries to deal with the twin evils of the 'unsettling of past negro marriages' and the relatively few facilities for the ex-slaves to marry.

<sup>61</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 643. On the benefits of the legalisation of Nonconformist missionaries, see also *The Edinburgh Review*, January 1838, 483.

Abolitionists, however, not only asked the government to recognise future Nonconformist marriages as valid in law but also those performed in the past. In fact, Mr. Beecham and others saw this as an even more important task because the effects of a formal marriage were not confined to the couples alone but also to the generations to come. He informed the Secretary of State in February 1836 that

those marriages among the negroes which were performed by the missionaries of the society while the negroes were regarded by the law as 'goods and chattel' as 'things' rather than 'persons' were sufficient to answer the purpose of marriage, so long as such continued to be the legal condition of the negro population, but no sooner were the negroes elevated to the state of persons and freemen than doubts were raised respecting the validity of their former marriages'.<sup>62</sup>

Three reasons were given to justify an Act to legalise past Nonconformist marriages. First, it would legitimate the offspring and hence make them capable of inheriting their parents' property. The latter was seen as an important requisite for a free Jamaica. Inheriting their parents' land, hut or other property would not only bind the children more closely to the land but also provide them with the assets necessary to expand their material aspirations. Secondly, it would prevent bigamy. Beecham mentioned, for instance, that many men who had been married by Nonconformist missionaries before 1834 had taken advantage of the fact that their marriages were not valid in law by leaving their wives and then legally marrying others. Finally, it was needed in order to enforce and protect 'the duties, rights and privileges incident to the marriage state', such as co-residence.<sup>63</sup> In other words, an Act that would legalise both future and past Nonconformist marriages would facilitate the creation of a truly free Jamaica.

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<sup>62</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 643.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 641-45.

The timing of the proposal could not have been better. The Reform Act of 1832 had led to a government which was willing to encroach upon ecclesiastical authority. In the spring of 1836, it embarked upon a drastic change in the marriage law. The new Marriage Act not only legalised marriages celebrated in Nonconformist chapels but also allowed for the civil registration of marriages and established a central registry office.<sup>64</sup> It clearly facilitated the letter that the Secretary of State sent to governor Sligo in March 1836 asking him to urge the Assembly to adopt a law that would meet the abolitionist demand to legalise past and future Nonconformist marriages.<sup>65</sup> Further pressure was put on the Assembly in the summer of 1836 when the Select Committee on the Apprenticeship concluded in its report that there was a 'need for all missionaries to solemnize marriages.'<sup>66</sup> The pressure paid off as in 1837 the Assembly passed a Marriage Act similar to that in the mother country.<sup>67</sup>

After August 1834 all abolitionists interpreted the attribute of legality as denoting protection by and submission to the law. Edward Eliot was one of the few abolitionists who emphasised the latter. He told an audience in the West Indies in 1836 that the marriage law forced a couple to be monogamous:

He may now marry, but unless he is faithful to the marriage bond, he will soon be involved in the evils of domestic wrangling, and will also be *punished by the law* [emphasis mine] of the country for his immoral and licentious practices.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> An enabling factor behind this marriage act was the gradual decline of the pre-eminence of the Church of England and the progress of Nonconformists sects in public life. The Methodist churches, for instance, saw their membership increase from 143,311 in 1810 to 288,182 in 1831. See N. McCord, *British History 1815-1906* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 120-22 and 239.

<sup>65</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 346.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. This conclusion was based on the statements of the anti-slavery lawyer John Jeremie and former S.M. Robert Madden and an in-depth analysis of the marriage laws in the colonies by Richard Matthews.

<sup>67</sup> *The Present Condition of the Negro Population in the British Colonies* (London, 1837), 25. The author of the pamphlet suggested that the act was a symbolic token as more important recommendations in the report of the Select Committee were 'treated with neglect amounting to contempt.'

<sup>68</sup> E. Eliot, *Christian Responsibilities Arising out of the Recent Change in our West India Colonies* (London, 1836), 59. See also Richard Matthew's remark that a legally married man or woman will be 'liable to the pains and penalties of the crime of bigamy.' *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 642.

The majority focused on the protection of conjugal rights and privileges, especially those of cross-plantation and free-apprenticed couples. Because of the numerous benefits that marriage bestowed upon the apprentices and wider society, they argued that the law should not only protect the conjugal rights and privileges of legally married couples, but also those married by Nonconformist missionaries. Some went even further and argued that long-term cohabiting couples should also be afforded legal protection. Governor Sligo, for instance, strongly disapproved of the practice adopted by planters to give only legally married apprentices permission to visit their cross-plantation partner.<sup>69</sup> In a letter to the Secretary of State in June 1835, he expressed the opinion that it was in 'the interests of morality' to allow non-legally married and long-term cohabiting apprentices access to their partner:

The long and lamentable disuse of marriage among the slave population of Jamaica has given birth to connections between the sexes, which however much to be lamented, must be borne with until they can be superseded by more legitimate unions formed under the influence of religious and moral culture. Such habits are certainly not to be eradicated by peremptory and unforeseen laws.<sup>70</sup>

Many abolitionists agreed that the planters' attempts to prevent cross-plantation couples from visiting one another were an impediment to civilisation. To combat this evil, they suggested a repeal of clause XXVII of the Jamaica Abolition Act which

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<sup>69</sup> *PP* 1835, vol. L, 236. For a similar remark, see Rev. William Bevan, *The Operation of the Apprenticeship System in the British Colonies* (London, 1837), 26.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* Sligo thus clearly agreed with S.M. Baynes and other 'enlightened' colonialists that the Apprenticeship System had to prepare the ex-slaves through religion and instruction for a proper marriage.

stipulated that apprentices needed written permission from their employer to leave the estate.<sup>71</sup>

Abolitionists were most concerned about the planters' disregard of the right of married couples to co-residence. It was especially in accounts of the hardships faced by free-apprenticed couples that they expressed a need for measures to ensure that apprentices could enjoy this right. Many planters charged free husbands and wives a very high rent to live on the estate or even forced them to leave the estate as soon as they were discharged from the Apprenticeship.<sup>72</sup> This practice was seen as a major obstacle to a more civilised society not only because it prevented couples from exercising their conjugal duties but also because it instilled in the couple feelings of rage and discontent with the Apprenticeship System. S.M. Edward Lyon expressed this most clearly in September 1836:

This state of conflict augments the influence of a pernicious state of public opinion, and the habits and feelings of the labouring population are left unsettled or exposed to very false views of happiness and utility.<sup>73</sup>

Like in the 1820s and early 1830s, abolitionists were keen to show that in spite of numerous obstacles, free-apprenticed couples did their utmost to exercise their conjugal rights and duties. They presented various accounts of freedmen who took extreme risks to spend time with their loved one(s). A *Statement of Facts* mentioned, for instance, that a free man who had visited his apprenticed wife against the explicit

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<sup>71</sup> PP 1836, vol. XV, 414.

<sup>72</sup> Only a small number of married couples were affected by this practice. Between August 1834 and March 1836, only 893 apprentices succeeded in buying themselves out of Apprenticeship. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 278. The apprentices' right to co-residence was also advocated in accounts of cross-plantation couples who were refused permission to live together. See, for example, Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 407; and PP 1835, vol. L, 116.

<sup>73</sup> PP 1837, vol. LIII, 217. Lyon argued indirectly that such practices failed to transform the ex-slaves into free labourers because they bred discontent with rather than respect for the law. The latter was seen as an important attribute of freedom.

wishes of her employer had been 'taken into custody, and forthwith conveyed before two local justices' who had sentenced him to one month of hard labour in the workhouse on account of trespassing.<sup>74</sup> Such accounts describing the 'criminalisation' of freedmen who tried to assert their conjugal rights served to show that the ex-slaves understood and were prepared to defend their newly acquired rights, and that planters prevented the working of the Apprenticeship System by not acknowledging these rights. Planters responded to such accusations by arguing that the 'criminalisation' was in accordance with the 1833 Trespassing Act, which stipulated that a person who 'damaged, injured or spoiled' real or personal property could be fined and that the 'injured party, or his servants' could apprehend the trespasser without a warrant.<sup>75</sup> Abolitionists dismissed this argument by pointing out that planters applied the Trespass Act to illegitimate cases, that is cases where the trespasser had 'a fair and reasonable supposition' that he had a right to trespass.<sup>76</sup> Marriage or even a long-term relationship provided, in their opinion, free men and women with a right to trespass. John Jeremie, for instance, told the Select Committee on the Apprenticeship that 'to debar husbands and wives of each other's society . . . is an invasion of the rights of the apprentice.'<sup>77</sup>

Two amendments to the Jamaica Abolition Act were proposed to protect the apprentices' right to co-residence. First, a clause that would make it obligatory for a planter 'to sell, at a fair valuation, the services of the wife to the master of her husband, or vice versa, under proper regulation.'<sup>78</sup> Second, a clause that would forbid planters to separate free-apprenticed couples.<sup>79</sup> The House of Assembly was receptive

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<sup>74</sup> *Statement of Facts*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> The 1833 Trespass Act reprinted in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 434-35.

<sup>76</sup> For this and other objections to the Trespass Act, see *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 435.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>78</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 336.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

to neither. Although the Colonial Office agreed with the abolitionists that it was 'quite illegal' to prevent couples from enjoying each other's company, it did very little to protect their right to co-residence. In June 1836, it instructed S.M.s that if they were presented with cases in which couples were denied access to each other that they rule in favour of the couple.<sup>80</sup> This went some way towards ensuring the domestic bliss of apprenticed couples but had little impact on free-apprenticed couples as the latter were subjected to two different legal systems. A freed apprentice who tried to defend his or her domestic rights was judged by a local magistrate who usually ruled in favour of the planters.<sup>81</sup>

### Conclusions

Thus for abolitionists a marriage that mirrored the metropolitan ideal was an important requisite for a free Jamaica. It would lead to a stable, moral, and civilised society with a sound economic foundation. Their proposals to increase the marriage rate and make it conform to the metropolitan ideal changed from measures to force or induce slaves to marry to those that put the responsibility on the planters, the Assembly and even the Colonial Office. They not only show that the abolitionist concept of the equality of the slaves changed over time but also that abolitionists were gradually convinced that there would not be a truly free Jamaica until white Jamaicans also shared the pleasures of married life.

The interpretation of certain attributes of the abolitionist ideal marriage and the emphasis placed on them also changed over time. The attribute of legality was

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<sup>80</sup> Circular 13 June 1836, Jamaica Archives, Thomas Davies Special Magistrate, 4/47.

primarily interpreted as sanctioned by an Anglican clergyman during slavery, while thereafter it was seen to denote protection by and submission to the marriage law. From the mid-1820s onwards, abolitionists emphasised the attribute of co-residence more heavily than others. This reflects most clearly the influence of the metropolitan ideology of domesticity, which presented the home as a source of social stability. Abolitionists were of the opinion that married couples could only properly exercise their conjugal duties if they lived under the same roof. Their emphasis on the home was accompanied by a clearer definition of the roles of husbands and wives. Secluded to the home, the wife was to look after her husband's and children's needs. The husband, on the other hand, was to act as the head of the household: he had to protect the home, exercise power over his wife and children, and had to provide for them.

The distinct roles of husbands and wives were articulated in various accounts of slave domestic life. The fact that the husband played a far more prominent role in them than the wife is another indication that the abolitionist notion of marriage was a patriarchal marriage. The image of the slave man that dominated the abolitionist debate was very different from that in the colonialist debate. He was a caring father and a man who not only understood the marriage contract but also tried to live up to it, by for instance purchasing his wife's freedom so that she could engage in her domestic duties. The image of the slave woman was similar to that in the colonialist debate. She was also presented as a very capable homemaker.

The abolitionists' continuous efforts to demonstrate the slaves' desire to marry and their ability to carry out their conjugal rights and duties had the effect of presenting marriage and domesticity as a natural rather than an ideal condition. It was implied that as soon as circumstances permitted, slaves would obtain a formal

<sup>81</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 217.



marriage and that women would withdraw from the field. In fact, there were times when abolitionists completely lost sight of the Jamaican reality. The call in the mid-1820s to withdraw slave women from the field, clearly failed to take into consideration that this would have a major impact on the production of the island's cash crops as it would cut the field labour force by half. By 1834, however, most abolitionists realised that their project could only succeed if there was a sound economic basis; and hence, they advocated gradual and voluntary withdrawal from fieldwork. They also realised that not all ex-slaves followed their script of obtaining a formal marriage and assuming the proper conjugal duties. This led them on the one hand to demand a law to legalise past Nonconformist marriages and on the other to suggest that long-term relationships should be afforded the same degree of protection as formal marriages.

There are thus various similarities between the abolitionist and colonialist debates about slave marriage. Both were subject to change, were varied in the sense that different groups expressed different views about the institution, were at times highly contradictory, and relied far more on representations of slave men than slave women.<sup>82</sup> Both debates also expressed the opinion that monogamy, permanency and distinct but complementary roles for husbands and wives were key attributes of the ideal slave marriage. Their different projects, however, led abolitionists and colonialists not only to allocate slave wives a different place - the home versus the field - but also to concentrate upon different roles of slave husbands and wives. Concerns about the decrease of the slave population, profits and stability made colonialists concentrate on the slave husband's role as provider of the home and the

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<sup>82</sup> The centrality of images of slave men in the debates about slave marriage points to the need for a full-length study on images of Caribbean slave men. The historiography of Caribbean slavery lags in this respect behind that of Antebellum slavery. Several studies have been published in recent years that

slave wife's role to look after her family's material needs. Their project of creating a more moral and civilised society led abolitionists to address in particular the slave husband's duty to protect the home and exercise authority over wife and children and the wife's task to take care of her family's emotional needs.

**PART III**  
**SLAVE WOMEN AS SUBJECTS OF PLANTATION DISCIPLINE**

### INTRODUCTION TO PART III

Of the all the indecencies tied up with the practice of slavery, abolitionists concentrated most upon the violence done to the slave body. They were especially concerned about the floggings in a semi-naked state which planters indiscriminately ordered for a variety of minor offences, mostly relating to work. By the mid-1820s, they addressed largely the flogging of slave women.<sup>1</sup> This was above all a strategy to arouse passion and encourage action. The flogging of women was more horrific than the flogging of men as they were physically weaker and therefore less able to bear corporal punishment. It was, however, also a means to demonstrate the backwardness of slave societies and the degeneracy of the local elites that maintained and defended it.

The abolitionist debate about female flogging triggered fierce reactions from both resident and absentee planters. The former could not conceive of a system of production without the use of physical coercion. They defended their right to flog the women by arguing that they did not conform to the European concept of the weaker sex. The absentees agreed with the abolitionists that slave women were in need of special care and often ameliorated or even ended the practice of female flogging. They, however, responded most strongly to the abolitionist contention that the punishment of slave women demonstrated the lack of humanity and civilised concern in master-slave relations.

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<sup>1</sup> The flogging of slave men not only played a more minor role than female flogging in abolitionist discourse but was also denounced on other grounds. The 'indecent' of male flogging was not the exposure of the body, as male bodies were not in themselves considered shameful, but the fact that it did not enable slave men to exercise an important attribute of masculinity: self-discipline. See D. Paton, 'Decency, Dependence and the Lash: Gender and the British Debate over Slave Emancipation, 1830-34', *Slavery and Abolition* 17, 3 (1996) 171.

This part examines the abolitionist and colonialist debates about the violence done to the black woman's body during the period of slavery and Apprenticeship. It outlines the abolitionists' moral and legal objections to female flogging and a few other forms of female physical abuse and also addresses their attempts to end them. It will show even more clearly than part II that the freeing of the slaves was part of their wider project of transforming West Indian societies. Two requisites for this project were articulated: a change in the gender roles of all islanders and a change in their relationship to power. The first was also addressed in the debates about slave motherhood and slave marriage. We shall see in the following chapters that abolitionists perfected their notions of femininity and masculinity in the debate about female physical abuse. They not only added new attributes but also placed a different emphasis on those mentioned earlier. For instance, they argued that men were not only to act as 'household heads' but also as 'men of feeling', that is as men who felt compassion for the suffering of others and were able to keep their propensity to aggression under control.

The examination of the colonialist debate will show that resident colonialists fought a fierce struggle to retain their right to punish their female workers as they saw fit. They denied the abolitionist accusations and also those by absentee planters on a variety of levels, ranging from the estate to the British parliament. In both this debate and the abolitionist, the slave woman functioned as a site where crucial political, social and cultural issues were addressed. Through her, abolitionists and colonialists conveyed not only ideas about femininity and masculinity but also about freedom and citizenship. Especially during the Apprenticeship period both sides articulated

attributes of citizenship, which ranged from the more cultural, such as 'self-discipline', to the more political, such as entitlement to full protection by the law.<sup>2</sup>

Under the 1788 Slave Law slave women could be given up to 39 lashes. The Abolition Act put an end to female flogging. Female apprentices who had committed offences against their employer were sent to a S.M. who usually sentenced them to time and labour in the workhouse. The planting class, however, used the loopholes in the law to allow the flogging of women in the workhouses. This change in the punishment regime was accompanied by a change in the contemporaries' debate about female physical abuse. Abolitionists, for example, shifted their focus from a concern about the women's indecent exposure to the severity of the flogging. To demonstrate and explain such changes, this part is divided into two chapters. Chapter six examines the debate during the period of slavery, while chapter seven looks at the ways in which it changed during the period of Apprenticeship.

Both chapters will demonstrate that the debate about the physical abuse of slave women was closely linked to the metropolitan discourses on punishment and human suffering. For most of the eighteenth century, flogging was a common form of punishment in the metropolitan society, not only of criminals but also of soldiers, sailors, children, convicts, and servants. It was assumed that the amount of physical suffering would deter the individual from reoffending. It was usually exercised in public so as to deter others from like offences. In other words, flogging was an important means in eighteenth-century Britain to control the population. From the 1770s onwards, there emerged reform movements against a wide-range of corporal punishments that tended to concentrate upon flogging. Their campaigns argued that

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<sup>2</sup> The recent studies on the post-emancipation period mentioned in the introduction have concentrated on the ideas and practices of citizenship and have examined in detail their interaction with notions of race and labour. These studies illustrate most clearly the ambiguous nature of the term citizenship.

flogging had such pernicious effects on the victim, the practitioner and the spectators that it failed to achieve its aim of deterrence. Proposals were put forward to replace flogging by punishments which were private and aimed not only to deter individuals from committing offences but also to reform them by administering a just amount of suffering that did not try to reach the offender's body but his soul.<sup>3</sup> Both abolitionists and colonialists were influenced by the reform campaigns. We shall see that they borrowed not only the rhetorical strategies of the reformers but also their proposals to change the punishment system.

Demonstrating the links between the contemporaries' debate and wider metropolitan discourses is one way in which this part differs from earlier studies on the physical abuse of Caribbean slave women. Earlier studies have described the punishment regime that slave women were subjected to and how it changed over time. Particular attention has been paid to the effects of the regime on the health of the women. Most studies, however, have addressed female physical abuse not to show that the women were victims of slavery but that they actively tried to resist the coercive plantation policies. They argue, for instance, that most of the punishments were the result of active resistance to the plantation regime.<sup>4</sup> Hilary Beckles' *Natural Rebels* stands out from other studies as it is also concerned with the arguments surrounding female physical abuse. It briefly points out that the contemporaries'

Citizenship refers to an individual's relation with the state as well as to his or her relation with the community.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Allan Lane, 1977; reprint, London: Penguin, 1991) was one of the first studies to examine and explain the shift in the late eighteenth century from public forms of punishment that aimed at the body of the offender to private forms of punishment that tried to reach the offender's soul. Various studies have been published in recent years that have applied Foucault's insights to a particular locality. Randall McGowen's article 'The Body and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Modern History* 59 (1987), 651-79 confirms Foucault's description of the transformation but does not wholly support his explanation for the change. Chapter 6 is largely informed by this article. Another Foucauldian approach to punishment that has proved very useful for this part is D. Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Bush, 'Defiance or Submission?'; and Dadzie, 'Searching for the Invisible Woman'.

debate was a clash of perceptions towards black women, with the abolitionists defending slave women's right to special care and pro-slavery activists arguing that they were equal to men.<sup>5</sup>

This part goes much further than Beckles' study. First, it provides a more detailed analysis of the contemporaries' arguments. As abolitionists concentrated more upon female flogging than any other issue in their campaigns, this part provides us more than the previous with an insight in the rhetorical strategies that they adopted to arouse passion and encourage action. We shall see that the strategies were varied - ranging from providing vivid descriptions of lacerated bodies and direct appeals to the reader to striking narratives of the deficiency of the island's law and judicial machinery -, and also changing. The change in punishment practices along with the change in the women's legal status after August 1834 led abolitionists to amend their strategies or even adopt new ones, such as providing names of physically abused women. The detailed examination of the abolitionists' rhetorical strategies in the following chapters will unveil the paradoxical nature of abolitionist discourse. The latter's belief in a common humanity was undermined, if not denied, by concentrating upon what the slave woman's body felt rather than what she thought or said about it. It is, however, not only the abolitionists' rhetorical strategies that will be illuminated more clearly in this part than in the foregoing. The following chapters will also set out more clearly the concrete methods used by the abolitionists to bring about a change in the condition of slave women. It will be shown that abolitionists first approached the Colonial Office and asked it to exert pressure on the House of Assembly to amend the slave law. When this action failed to achieve its desired effect, they then asked the government to issue legislation.

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<sup>5</sup> Beckles, *Natural Rebels*, 39.



The analysis of the colonialist remarks about female physical abuse does not provide many new insights into the discourse of slavery. It does, however, demonstrate more clearly than the foregoing chapters the various ways in which colonialists responded to abolitionist accusations of inhuman treatment. Their responses ranged from denying the accusations and blaming slave women themselves for their suffering to justifying the treatment by pointing out the ways in which it benefited the women. It also lends further weight to the conclusion that resident and non-resident colonialists formed important power groups in the discourse of slavery. It points out that their struggle reached a peak in the mid-1820s when non-residents, without success, urged the local legislature to enact improvements in the condition of slave women, which contained among others a ban on female flogging.

This part then clearly rejects Beckles' assumption that the colonialist debate about female physical abuse was a unanimous discussion. It also deviates from Beckles' study in that it incorporates the period of Apprenticeship. Part I and II have shown that planters adopted practices on their estates after August 1834 that had to enable them to retain as much control over their female labour force as possible. Chapter 7 demonstrates that they also used the workhouse for this purpose. It outlines the ways in which this institution allowed the planters to keep the old power relations in the island intact and also describes their struggle to avoid outside interference in the running of the institution.

The previous parts have argued that the representation of slave women was an extremely complex process and that it had both positive and negative effects on slave women's lives. This part will not only provide further evidence of the complexity of representation but will also make the reader aware that those who provided the representations were as much affected by them as those who were represented.

Colonialists and abolitionists mentioned in this debate a whole range of characteristics that slaves as well as certain members of white Jamaican society lacked. In defining and identifying these others, colonialists and abolitionists defined and identified themselves as 'men of feeling', citizens and so on. This part suggests, in other words, that the representation of others is also an act of self-representation.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE INDECENCY OF THE LASH

Under the 1788 Slave Law, a slave woman could not be given more than ten lashes if an owner or overseer was not present but if an owner or overseer was present, then she could get 39 lashes maximum. No exception was made for pregnant, old or infirm women. The usual mode of flogging was to have a woman held down by several fellow slaves, while a slave driver, overseer or her owner flogged bare parts of her body with a cart whip, ebony brushes or another instrument. On most estates, flogging was a public event that took place in front of a large gathering of slaves and estate officers.<sup>1</sup>

Realising that excessive corporal punishment destroyed slave women's capacity to produce and reproduce and also bred resentment amongst them, the Jamaican planting class not only enacted a bill that laid down the maximum number of lashes but also one that gave slave women the right to obtain legal redress in case they were excessively flogged. From 1788 onwards, slave women could launch a complaint with a local magistrate against their owner, an estate officer or any other person in the island for exceeding the legally allowed number of lashes or for other forms of gross abuse. The process of achieving redress was lengthy and very complicated. If three or more local justices were of the opinion after an examination of the complainant's body that the complaint was grounded, a so-called Council of Protection was formed consisting of the vestry and local justices. Its duty was to

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<sup>1</sup>1788 *Slave Law*, 210. A planter or officer who exceeded the number of lashes could be fined up to ten pounds. The clause remained valid, with some minor alterations, until 1834. Research has been carried out into the punishments inflicted by the Jamaican slave courts but thus far no detailed study has been published on the punishment regimes in force on Jamaican plantations. See, for instance, D. Paton, 'Punishment, Crime and the Bodies of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica', *Journal of Social History* 34, 4 (2001), 923-54.

investigate the complaint by examining several witnesses and if necessary file a suit against the offender. If an Assize or Quarter Sessions court found the accused guilty, he could be ordered to pay a fine of one hundred pounds or even be sent to prison for twelve months.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1820s, several planters changed their attitude towards female flogging. Some modified the practice by replacing the whip by a switch or by flogging women only in private, while others exempted certain categories of women from flogging or substituted the practice by solitary confinement.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the planters, however, remained firmly convinced that only the threat and use of flogging would keep slave women in control. The House of Assembly was the major line of defence in their battle to uphold their right to punish slave women as they pleased. It not only dismissed repeated recommendations to regulate or abolish female flogging from the Colonial Office but also those from the West India Committee and its own members.<sup>4</sup> As a result, Jamaican slave women continued to be subjected to the lash until the Abolition Act took effect in August 1834.<sup>5</sup>

Abolitionists argued that flogging affected slave women's ability to exercise their role as guardians of morality as much as their sexual abuse did. Slave women were in their opinion not the only ones affected by the practice. It also had an impact on their partners and children, the slave drivers, and even white Jamaicans. Or, in the words of the Methodist missionary the Reverend Robert Young: 'It is much calculated to sour and brutalise the minds of all concerned.'<sup>6</sup> The first section examines the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 209. The clause also stipulated that courts could order the complainant's discharge of slavery as a means of 'future protection.'

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, De La Beche, *Notes on Condition*, 20 and 45; and Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 119. There was no change in the offences to which flogging applied.

<sup>4</sup> *PP* 1824, vol. XXIV, 443; and *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 224. Beaumont lost his seat in the Assembly as a result of this and other far-reaching bills he proposed.

<sup>5</sup> Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 106; and Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 433.

<sup>6</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 428.

abolitionist reactions to female flogging. It starts with an analysis of what they believed to be the effects of the practice on the slave community and white Jamaican society. It finishes with an examination of the abolitionists' attempts to ban the practice and their discussion about slave women's lack of legal protection against gross abuse. Some colonialists agreed with the abolitionists that female flogging was such a morally corrupting influence that it had to be banned. The majority, however, disapproved of a ban on the grounds that flogging, even in a state of undress, did not morally degrade slave women. The responses of both sides to the abolitionists' objections to female flogging will be examined in the second section, alongside the arguments used by the House of Assembly to defend the planters' right to flog slave women. The final section examines the images of slave women that both sides drew upon and demonstrates the links between this debate and the wider contemporary discourse on human suffering.

### **'An Outrage on All Decency'<sup>7</sup>**

Female flogging played a marginal role in abolitionist writings during the campaign to abolish the slave trade. A few (former) residents mentioned it in their testimonies before the Slave Trade Committee and expressed their disapproval of the practice in verse. It featured more prominently in the campaign for emancipation, especially in writings advocating immediate emancipation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Early abolitionist writings provide, however, numerous accounts of female flogging on the slave ships. See, for example, M.A. Favret, 'Flogging: The Anti-Slavery Movement Writes Pornography', *Essay and Studies* (1998), 19-43; and M. Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), chap. 5.

Accounts of lacerated female bodies served primarily as a means of arousing compassion and encouraging action on behalf of the sufferer. This was first done by asking the readers to identify themselves with the suffering woman, or as was more often the case with her partner who could not prevent her punishment. One pamphlet asked its female readers to 'help the poor slave women' because they were flogged when they carried out 'the most important of all maternal duties at any other time than the prescribed hours of the overseer.'<sup>9</sup> A second strategy was the use of rich layers of detail that aimed to make the pain of the women seem real. Captain Studholme Hogson, who was stationed in the island in the early 1830s, described the following scene:

Imagine a woman brought out before the whole assembled gang, then stripped of her covering, and thrown upon the earth, her legs and arms tightly held by four men. These appalling preparations concluded, executioners, armed with knotted cords, proceed to inflict stripe after stripe until nature almost sinks under the murderous punishment.<sup>10</sup>

The pain was also made more real by denying the victim a voice. Benjamin McMahon concentrated in his account of the flogging of a young girl on what her body felt, rather than what she said:

The girl gave the most piercing shrieks I ever heard from a human being, and continued shrieking until entirely exhausted, she then lay writhing and shuddering, giving a dreadful groan at each lash . . . she was panting, or grasping for breath - and in a broken voice scarcely audible, she cried "water!, water!, water!".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Dialogue between a Well-Wisher*, 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Captain S. Hodgson, *Truths from the West Indies: Including a Sketch of Madeira in 1833* (London, 1838), 144. Such descriptions also served to enhance the virtue of the readers by allowing them to feel compassion for the suffering of others. Karen Halttunen's article 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain' has explained this process of 'spectatorial sympathy' in detail.

<sup>11</sup> McMahon, *Jamaica Plantership*, 53.

Some abolitionists, however, refrained from giving such vivid descriptions. They conveyed the atrocious nature of female flogging by informing the reader that they had been unable to watch the event. In his account of a court case investigating the physical abuse of several slave women, Rev. Richard Bickell mentioned that they 'were in such a state that I could not bear to look at them after the first sight, but turned my face away while the examination went on.'<sup>12</sup>

The abolitionist scenes of female flogging expressed the general theme that slavery reduced the slaves to a less than fully human condition; or in the words of the Reverend Mr. Trew: 'Every stroke inflicted upon her sinks her lower in the scale of being.'<sup>13</sup> More particularly, they expressed a concern about the slave woman's ability to sustain and improve the moral qualities of her husband and children. Abolitionists strongly emphasised the fact that during the flogging parts of the woman's body were exposed, either because she was forced to bare parts of her body or because the lash had torn the clothes from her back.<sup>14</sup> The abolitionist collection *Negro Slavery* (1823), for instance, based its conclusion that female flogging was a 'horrid and cruel profanation' on the fact that it involved 'exposing in the most *shameless* [emphasis mine] manner, in the presence of the whole gang, the person of every female.'<sup>15</sup> According to the abolitionists, the 'indecent' nudity prevented slave women from attaining the level of purity needed to be a moral regenerator. The Secretary of State, Lord Goderich, remarked in 1831 that the usual mode of flogging repressed the 'growth of the appropriate virtues of the female character.'<sup>16</sup> While all abolitionists

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<sup>12</sup> Bickell, *The West Indies as They Are*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Trew cited in Jackson, *Memoir*, 112.

<sup>14</sup> Some scholars have argued that the abolitionists eroticised the suffering of the slaves by focussing on the exposure of the victim's body rather than the severity of the practice. See, for instance, Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism', 324; and Favret, 'Flogging', 24.

<sup>15</sup> *Negro Slavery*, 104.

<sup>16</sup> Goderich in a letter to J.C. Smyth, 25 July 1831 in *PP* 1832, vol. XLVI, no. 3. Goderich had strong links with the abolitionist movement and played an educational and propagandist role in the

agreed that the mode of female flogging demonstrated that planters did little to elevate slave women and hence how uncivilised white Jamaican society was, few attempted to explain the planters' preference for flogging women in a state of undress. William Wilberforce argued that it was the result of the planters' assumption that nature had not endowed slave women with a sense of shame.<sup>17</sup> The anonymous author of *The Death Warrant of Negro Slavery* (1829) suggested that the mode of flogging served the sexual needs of white men in the island:

What we pay a poll-tax for, is simply, that the West Indians may have the luxury of the whip. We pay for the pleasurable titillation excited in colonial men by the exercise of the constitutional right of the flogging of women.<sup>18</sup>

To convey the impact of flogging on slave women's purity, some abolitionists gave very vivid descriptions, in an almost voyeuristic way, of the exposed body parts. Benjamin McMahon mentioned that the 'velvet skin' of the young girl was 'covered with blood - her body from the shoulder to the thighs, was one frightful mass of mangled flesh.'<sup>19</sup> Others expressed it by omitting direct references to the women's nudity. Rev. Richard Bickell wrote, for example, that slave women were flogged 'on those parts which shall be nameless for me, but which in women, for decency's sake, ought never to be exposed.'<sup>20</sup> The impact was also shown through comparisons of slave women with English women. *The Negro's Memorial* (1825) declared that 'the females accustomed to the exposure of their persons, can have none of that attractive modesty which forms a part of their character in Europe.'<sup>21</sup>

emancipation of the slaves by exposing abuses of planters and exerting pressure on them. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 62.

<sup>17</sup> Wilberforce, *Appeal to the Religion*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> *The Death Warrant of Negro Slavery throughout the British Dominions* (London, 1829), 33.

<sup>19</sup> McMahon, *Jamaica Plantership*, 52-53.

<sup>20</sup> Bickell, *The West Indies as They Are*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Negro's memorial*, 60.



Through the use of such rhetorical strategies, then, abolitionists articulated an important attribute of the metropolitan ideal of womanhood - purity -, which they offered slave women on the assumption that they were full and equal human beings.<sup>22</sup> Examples of women who resisted indecent exposure were provided to demonstrate slave women's ability to be pure. Henry Bleby, for example, referred to a woman who had asked her tormentor that 'her nakedness might not be indecently exposed' as an example of 'matronly modesty.'<sup>23</sup> Considering the abolitionists' aim to encourage action, it is not surprising that all such examples of resistance ended in failure. The saddest tale of resistance is without doubt that of Cato, a slave woman who felt so 'indignant at being thus degraded' that she 'tore her dress, and hung herself with it.'<sup>24</sup>

Like in the debate about slave women's sexual abuse, abolitionists focussed more on the spectators (the partners, children and estate officers) than on the victim. They often described scenes where a woman was held down by one of her own children or where her children were among the spectators of the event.<sup>25</sup> They argued that the flogging had a detrimental impact on the children. First, it gave them an incorrect understanding of right and wrong in society. According to Rev. Mr. Trew, 'a wish to desecrate the wretch that made their mother weep', was the only lesson that children learned from watching their mother being flogged. Second, it 'weakened', if not completely 'destroyed', their affection for their mother.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Purity involved more than the absence of sexual thoughts and experiences. It also implied behaviour that did not excite sexual feelings in others or otherwise caused shame or shock. Purity, then, had a sexual and a moral component. See Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles*, 188. See also his account of a slave woman who was flogged for accusing a driver of having used 'inappropriate language'.

<sup>24</sup> Hodgson, *Truths from the West Indies*, 145n.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, *Memoirs of Charles Campbell*, 20; and J. Campbell, *A Letter to Sir Robert Peel, on the Subject of British Colonial Slavery* (Edinburgh, 1830), 53.

<sup>26</sup> Trew cited in Jackson, *Memoir*, 113 and 120.

As to the partners, the flogging also blunted their feelings and aroused a negative taste for cruelty.<sup>27</sup> It was also argued, as mentioned in the previous chapter, that it prevented them from marrying their long-term partner. Some abolitionists were even of the opinion that female flogging caused slave men to be unfaithful.<sup>28</sup> Finally, flogging was like the women's sexual abuse seen as an obstacle for slave men to exercise their role as protector of the home. Former resident Captain Majoribanks conveyed this idea in verse:

No sex, no age, you ever learn'd to spare,  
but female limbs indecently lay bare;  
see the poor mother lay her babe aside!  
nor midst her pangs, her tears, her horrid cries,  
dare the sad husband turn his pitying eyes.<sup>29</sup>

It was most often, however, expressed in direct appeals to the readers' sympathy. The pamphlet *A Letter to John Bull* (1823), for instance, asked: 'What would thou have said John, if, . . . thy wife, or perhaps thy grown-up daughter were stretched naked, with face downwards on the floor . . . and lacerated with a whip.'<sup>30</sup>

Abolitionists, then, implied that a ban on female flogging would not only turn the slave man into a dutiful husband and a devotee of hearth and family but also into a 'man of feeling' whose self-control and compassion were marks of his virtuous nature.<sup>31</sup> They mentioned the latter attribute even more clearly in their remarks about

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 112; *General History of Negro Slavery*, 88; and the statements of William Taylor and Robert Young in *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 56-57 and 428.

<sup>28</sup> *Negro's Memorial*, 60.

<sup>29</sup> Captain Majoribanks, *Slavery: An Essay in Verse* (Edinburgh, 1802), 13. The slave man who acquiesced in his partner's flogging was a more common image in fictional accounts of female flogging than the slave man who actively tried to protect his partner's virtue. An example of the latter can be found in [Rushton], *West Indian Eclogues*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *A Letter to John Bull: To Which Is Added the Sketch of a Plan for the Safe, Speedy, and Effectual Abolition of Slavery* (London, 1823), 12.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion of the 'man of feeling', see Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism'.

the drivers who applied the whip.<sup>32</sup> These slave men were generally described as willing to inflict needless pain. Captain Studholme Hodgson mentioned a driver who 'directed the lash, with unerring aim, at the same precise spot, until he has worked deep into the flesh, and well established what he facetiously called a raw.'<sup>33</sup> Rev. Thomas Cooper used the body of a victim to reveal the drivers' positive taste for cruelty:

I am myself certain that the woman was very severely punished, for I saw from my own window the driver beating her with a whip as she was in the gang at work, and he certainly struck her with great violence. The wounds which I saw on her back proved that her complaint was just.<sup>34</sup>

The drivers were also accused of lacking compassion, especially for pregnant and nursing women. Henry Whiteley mentioned in his account of a seven-week stay on New Ground estate in 1832 that a driver had given a woman who had tried to leave work early in order to visit her child in the estate hospital such a severe flogging that she had 'screamed out violently.'<sup>35</sup> Such accounts of sadistic drivers served above all to show how much slavery corrupted everyone involved. William Wilberforce expressed most clearly that the institution supplied the drivers with the temptation to abuse their power:

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<sup>32</sup> Planters appointed several slave men to head the first and second gang on the basis of their intelligence, ability, and knowledge of planting. They received their orders directly from the overseer and had to report to him on completion of work. Most drivers were allowed to use the whip on their own authority. The drivers formed the elite of the slave community as they were bestowed with favours and privileges, such as larger allowances of food and clothing. Slaves often applied to them to adjust differences in an extra-legal court of arbitration and they often pleaded with the management on behalf of the slave community. See Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 19-20; and Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 63.

<sup>33</sup> Hodgson, *Truth from the West Indies*, 144.

<sup>34</sup> Cooper, *Facts Illustrative*, 56.

<sup>35</sup> H. Whiteley, *Excessive Cruelty to Slaves: Three Months in Jamaica in 1832* (London, 1833), 10. This pamphlet, narrating almost all of the twenty formal floggings he witnessed during his stay, was

Though they are forbidden to give more than a few lashes at a time, as the immediate chastisement of faults committed at their work, yet the power over the slaves which they thus possess *unavoidably invests them with a truly formidable tyranny* [emphasis mine], the consequences of which, to the unfortunate subjects of it, are often in the highest degree oppressive and pernicious. No one who reflects on the subject can be at a loss to anticipate one odious use which is too commonly made of this despotism, in exhorting, from the fears of the young females who are subject to it, compliances with the licentious desires of the drivers, which they might otherwise have refused from attachment to another, if not from moral feelings and restraints.<sup>36</sup>

A less common image of a driver can be found in Henry Bleby's *Death Struggles of Slavery*. It mentions a driver who refused to follow an order to flog his own wife for having stolen a piece of sugar cane.<sup>37</sup> This image served to show that slave men had the ability to exercise their role as protector of the home.

Thus in their reactions to female flogging, abolitionists defined slaves primarily on the basis of what they lacked. Slave women were seen to lack the feminine virtue of purity, while slave men did not possess such male virtues as compassion, courage, and determination. Slave women's white tormentors (male and female) were also defined on the basis of the virtues that they lacked. Abolitionists tried in various ways to make their readers question the supposed civilisation of the planters and their white employees. First, they concentrated upon the flogging of those categories of slave women that were most in need of protection: pregnant and nursing women.<sup>38</sup> It was suggested that these women were solely punished for carrying out their maternal duties.<sup>39</sup> Abolitionists were most enraged about the 'barbarous' and 'revolting' practice of flogging pregnant women. They argued that this was one of the main obstacles to natural increase as it led to miscarriages, stillbirths

one of the most popular abolitionist pamphlets in the 1830s. In the first two weeks 200,000 copies were sold abroad alone. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 60 and 97.

<sup>36</sup> Wilberforce, *Appeal to the Religion*, 17-18.

<sup>37</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> The focus on the flogging of these two categories of slave women also stemmed from the fact that detailed descriptions of their floggings were the least likely to sexually arouse the readers.

and even the death of the mother in childbirth.<sup>40</sup> The practice featured especially in abolitionist fiction. The short story 'Zangara' (1826) related that Quahama's flogging

brought on premature labour. She was taken back and delivered of a dead child. When I [the husband] was informed of it, and got to her, she seemed very near her end . . . I saw that her pains and sorrows would soon be over. This was the case. We followed her corpse the next day to the grave.<sup>41</sup>

Abolitionist accounts of flogged pregnant women were not only used to demonstrate the planters' lack of civilisation but also to demand imperial legislation to allow slave women a greater degree of purity. The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* stated in February 1831:

Nay, the pregnant female is not by law exempted. One would have thought that our legislators, moved by the common feelings of our common nature, would have interposed, the protecting arm of the law to shield the female, when thus situated, from the brutal power of ferocious man. But no - even she can be laid down, exposed, and flogged in the presence of the assembled population of the estate!<sup>42</sup>

It was argued that the measures that some planters had adopted to modify the flogging of pregnant women were not enough to provide the women with the decency that they deserved. Only their complete exemption from the lash was seen as sufficient.<sup>43</sup>

A second way in which abolitionists tried to convey the idea that white men in the island did little to elevate slave women was to give examples of female flogging that exceeded the legally allowed number of lashes. Most abolitionists addressed the

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Whiteley, *Excessive Cruelty*, 10; and Bickell, *The West Indies as They Are*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Lieutenant Baker-Davison's statement in *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 157; and William Taylor's statement in *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 28.

<sup>41</sup> 'Zangara', 36.

<sup>42</sup> *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, February 1831, 129. The Anti-Slavery Society established this journal in 1825. It served as a means for debating the objectives of abolitionism as well as for conducting the Society's propaganda. Its scope extended beyond the West Indies. It also published detailed information on the continuing Atlantic slave trade and on the workings of various American slave system. See Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 422-23.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

conduct of white overseers as they more often than the planters ordered such punishments or inflicted it themselves. Captain Studholme Hodgson wrote, for example, that 'it often occurs that the overseer cannot curb his fury sufficiently long to admit of the requisite preparations.'<sup>44</sup> Henry Whiteley agreed with him that Jamaican overseers were nothing but sadists. He wrote in his travel account that an overseer had told him, after excessively flogging two young girls for not having done their work sufficiently, that it was the 'best cracking, by G-!' <sup>45</sup> It was furthermore argued that the regular infliction of pain had deadened the overseers' feelings as much as the drivers'. Henry Bleby mentioned, for instance, that an overseer had denied a woman's request not to be indecently exposed with words 'too gross to be repeated.'<sup>46</sup>

Far more condemning language was used for planters who went beyond the slave law. Rev. Benjamin Godwin, for example, referred to one of them as a 'monster of cruelty.'<sup>47</sup> In his discussion of the court case relating to the flogging of Kitty Hylton by her master the Reverend G. W. Bridges, Goderich pointed out first of all that the punishment had been out of all proportion: 'For a trifling mistake in the execution of her master's orders, this female slave appears to have been first violently struck and kicked by her master, and then, by his directions, flogged with such severity as to have excited the commiseration of every person who bore witness to her appearance after the punishment.'<sup>48</sup> Secondly, he concluded that Bridges' conduct had been 'unmanly and disgraceful' and could not be excused as a 'momentary ebullition of

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<sup>44</sup> Hodgson, *Truths from the West Indies*, 144.

<sup>45</sup> Whiteley, *Excessive Cruelty*, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles*, 188.

<sup>47</sup> Godwin, *Lectures on Colonial Slavery*, 49.

<sup>48</sup> *PP* 1830-31, vol. XVI, 231. In April 1829, Kitty appealed to a local magistrate who considered her complaint grounded and set up a Council of Protection. The Council decided by thirteen votes to four not to prosecute Bridges. After a letter from a local abolitionist, Goderich ordered the Attorney General to prepare an indictment against Bridges. The Grand Jury, however, refused to find a true bill. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 62.

anger' because the cruelty had been 'repeated and persevering'.<sup>49</sup> He also referred to the conduct of Mr. Jackson, a planter who had physically abused Kate and Ann Whitfield, as 'unmanly'.<sup>50</sup> Goderich clearly measured these masters against the metropolitan ideal of manhood, which urged men to control their innate propensity to aggression.<sup>51</sup> Other accounts of the Kitty Hylton case also emphasised Bridges' lack of self-control. Because the tormentor was a clergyman of 'talent and respectability' (he had written a history of Jamaica as well as several pamphlets in defence of slavery) the case provided abolitionists with an excellent means to demonstrate that slavery corrupted whites as much as slaves. Henry Bleby, for instance, regarded Bridges as an incarnation of all the 'evils inherent in human slavery'.<sup>52</sup>

Abolitionists, then, suggested that white men in the island deviated as much as slave men from the metropolitan ideal of manhood. They clearly did not possess a 'manly' mind that was free from physical sensation and were not 'men of feeling'. This idea was not only conveyed through images of brutal men who willingly inflicted pain and felt no sympathy for their victims but also through comparisons of white male Jamaicans with men at home. The Baptist missionary William Knibb, for instance, asked his readers: 'What Englishman could stand by, what Englishman could even contemplate the flogging of a female without a flush of indignation?'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *PP* 1831-32 vol. XLVII, 387. Mr. Jackson, the custos of Port Royal, and his wife had abused the mother and daughter for more than five months before a complaint about their treatment was made to magistrate Dr. Palmer. He established a Council of Protection in June 1831, which decided that there were no grounds for prosecution. Two months later, a Grand Jury threw out a bill of indictment against Mr. Jackson. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 62-64.

<sup>51</sup> Goderich stated repeatedly that female flogging fostered 'base and unmanly aspects in the other sex.' See, for instance, *PP* 1831-32, vol. XLVI, no. 3. On men and violence in early nineteenth-century England, see Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 15 and 29.

<sup>52</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles*, 74. See also the letter of a local abolitionist cited in *PP* 1830-31, vol. XVI, 202-03.

<sup>53</sup> Knibb cited in Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, 213. For a similar comparison, see *Memoirs of Charles Campbell*, 20.

Abolitionist writings contain a disproportionate amount of accounts of mistresses who superintended the whipping of slave women or even flogged them themselves.<sup>54</sup> Dr. Jackson told the Slave Trade Committee that he had been shocked to find 'a lady of some consequence in the island, superintending the punishment of her slaves, male and female, ordering the number of lashes, and with her own hands flogging the negro driver, if he did not punish the slaves properly.'<sup>55</sup> The shock of Jackson and that of many other abolitionists stemmed from the fact that the mistress violated far more the metropolitan gender norms than her male counterpart. She was not confined to her 'proper sphere' - the home - and lacked the important feminine virtues of tenderness and delicacy. Abolitionists concentrated upon the latter. They argued that the infliction of pain on slave women degraded the mistresses to such an extent that they were unable to improve the moral qualities of both white and black Jamaican society.<sup>56</sup>

Like her male counterpart, the mistress ordered or inflicted excessive pain for trivial offences. *A Word from the Bible* (1829) referred to a mistress as a 'monster in the shape of a woman' because she had ordered a slave woman to be severely flogged for having burnt some clothes 'which were not worth five shillings.'<sup>57</sup> She also failed to display compassion for her victims by denying their calls for mercy as well as requests of white bystanders to stop her 'degrading practices.' Lieutenant Baker-Davison mentioned in his statement before the Slave Trade Committee that his

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<sup>54</sup> Only a small percentage of white women in the island were slaveholders. Most of the mistresses referred to by the abolitionists were urban slaveholding women or wives of planters who were responsible for managing the domestic slaves. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, 107. For information on the way white slaveholding women treated their female slaves, see H. Beckles, 'White Women and Slavery in the Caribbean', *History Workshop Journal*, 36 (1993), 66-82.

<sup>55</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 52.

<sup>56</sup> *Negro Slavery* mentioned, for instance, that it rendered mistresses 'dead alike to the feelings of tenderness.' For more information on the link between women's finer sensibility and their role as guardian of morality, see Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 23-24; and Tosh, *Man's Place*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> *A Word from the Bible: Common Prayer Books, and Laws of England, on Behalf of Enslaved British Subjects* (London, 1829), 55.



various attempts to stop a neighbouring mistress from 'flogging her slaves too cruelly' had been in vain.<sup>58</sup> The mistress also resembled her male counterpart in that she enjoyed the infliction of pain and the humiliation of the slave women. The main character in Charlotte Smith's novel *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794) stated that a mistress who had supervised the flogging of a young slave girl 'seemed to me to enjoy the spectacle.'<sup>59</sup>

Some abolitionists argued that the mistress's eagerness to flog stemmed from the island's norm of white womanhood. Dr. Jackson mentioned that 'it was thought necessary, indeed, for an industrious wife to be severe and rigid in the punishment of her slaves.'<sup>60</sup> Their accounts of the mistress's treatment of her domestics provided a sharp contrast with the way in which mistresses in the metropolitan society treated their female servants. The latter tried as much as possible to follow the manuals on servant-keeping which stipulated that they had to: treat their female servants with respect; care for them when ill; teach them important moral values; and control them by means of rewards rather than punishments.<sup>61</sup>

While abolitionists writing in the late eighteenth century concentrated upon the mistress's taste for cruelty, those in the 1820s and early 1830s stressed the fact that she did nothing to prevent the indecent exposure of her female victims. J. Campbell, for instance, emphasised that Eleanor Mead's mistress had 'ordered her to be conveyed in her naked and exposed state to the bilboes, by two men, herself walking behind.'<sup>62</sup> Some abolitionists went even further and suggested that the mistress was sexually aroused by the spectacle of watching her female victims in a state of nudity. Rev.

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<sup>58</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 152.

<sup>59</sup> C. Smith, *The Wanderings of Warwick* (London, 1804), 54.

<sup>60</sup> *Slave Trade Committee Report*, vol. 82, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 388-96.

<sup>62</sup> Campbell, *Letter to Sir Robert Peel*, 53. For similar remarks, see Cooper cited in *The Edinburgh Review*, February 1823, 174; and *Word from the Bible*, 54.

Richard Bickell mentioned a mistress who only flogged her slave women when they were washing themselves in a pond.<sup>63</sup> By denying her female victims a sense of decency, then, the mistress prevented slave women from adhering to their proper gender roles. Another way in which she did this was by not setting them an example of female virtue. Goderich expressed this most clearly in his discussion of the ways in which Mrs. Jackson had physically abused Kate and Ann Whitfield: 'With such a domestic example, what decorum could be expected from an ignorant negress?'<sup>64</sup>

The abolitionist reactions to female flogging thus betray a clear anxiety about the gender roles of both black and white Jamaicans. They argued indirectly that Jamaica could only become a more moral and civilised society if women possessed the 'finer sensibilities', such as tenderness, and men controlled their aggression, were sensitive to the suffering of others and protected the purity of women. A ban on rather than the regulation of female flogging was in their opinion an essential step to conform the gender norms of the two groups more closely to those in the metropolitan society. James Losh, for instance, disapproved of a law that would only forbid the flogging of women in a state of undress, while Rev. Mr. Trew saw no point in replacing the whip by other harsh instruments.<sup>65</sup> Initially, abolitionists argued that the best way to achieve a ban was for the Colonial Office to exert pressure on the House of Assembly.<sup>66</sup> By 1824, however, they were firmly convinced that 'only an act of parliament will compel the changes required.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Bickell cited in Barclay, *Practical View*, 446.

<sup>64</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XLVII, 385. She had ordered, or inflicted herself, a variety of corporal punishments, ranging from flogging and beating to confinement in the stocks. The women had suffered far more at her hands than her husband's. The common law doctrine of coverture implied, however, that she could not be sued for mistreating the women.

<sup>65</sup> *Speech of James Losh*, 10; and Trew cited in Jackson, *Memoir*, 113.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, *Speech of James Losh*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Report of the Anti-Slavery Society cited in *The Edinburgh Review*, October-January 1824-25, 213. For a similar remark, see *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, February 1831, 29.

Abolitionists accompanied their calls for a ban on female flogging often with remarks about the insufficiency of the law and the judicial machinery in the island that largely echoed the sentiments expressed about the master and his white employees. It was argued that white men who exceeded the legally allowed number of lashes were seldom punished for their deed. Firstly, this was because biased magistrates dismissed slave women's complaints of excessive flogging. Henry Bleby mentioned, for instance, that it was not surprising that the Council of Protection investigating the case of Kitty Hylton had not issued a lawsuit against Bridges, because it was 'composed entirely of persons who were slave owners and the personal friends of Mr. Bridges.'<sup>68</sup> Secondly, local magistrates obstructed the course of justice. Goderich mentioned, for example, that magistrate McLeod had forsaken his duty in the case of Eleanor James. Because of some 'urgent business', he had sent the severely flogged woman to the clerk of peace, who lived thirty miles away. This led Goderich to conclude that McLeod lacked 'the active feelings and natural charities to be expected in a man whose disposition are just and humane.'<sup>69</sup> Goderich also complained about the fact that it had taken McLeod almost two months to set up a Council of Protection and that its meetings were regularly postponed because the members failed to turn up.<sup>70</sup> Finally, until 1831 slave evidence was not admitted in courts that tried white people.<sup>71</sup> Grand Juries generally used two arguments to justify their decision to acquit perpetrators. Firstly, that 'it was impossible for a master [or his

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<sup>68</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles*, 79. Goderich mentioned that bias was also the reason why the Council of Protection had dismissed the claim of Kate and Ann Whitfield. See *PP* 1831-32, vol. XLVII, 385.

<sup>69</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XLVI, 313. A neighbouring planter had flogged Eleanor in December 1829. The case was investigated by a Council of Protection in February 1830. Shortly after the Council dismissed the case, the Colonial Office issued an investigation into the behaviour of the various magistrates and vestrymen who sat on the Council.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 311-13. As a result of the postponements, one of the key witnesses had seen chance to leave the island.

<sup>71</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 266. From then onwards it was only admitted in certain criminal cases and was subject to several conditions. See *1826 Slave Law*, 37.

representative] to destroy his own property.<sup>72</sup> Secondly, that there was not sufficient evidence that the perpetrator had surpassed the 10 or 39 lashes.<sup>73</sup> Like most abolitionists, Goderich argued that the verdicts blemished not only the reputation of the members of the Grand Jury but that of the whole of white Jamaican society:

I cannot but be apprehensive that the Grand Jury have committed an error of judgement, which, for every consideration of what is due to the ends of public justice, to their own good repute, and to the credit of the Colonial Society, is deeply to be deplored.<sup>74</sup>

The magistrates' bias was, according to the abolitionists, the main reason why slave women refrained from seeking redress. Rev. Richard Bickell was, for instance, of the opinion that

the poor wretches do not very often lay their complaints before the partial justices for legal redress (as they get an additional flogging for bringing such a charge, if not well proved) but weep, over, and lament their hard and degrading lot in secret.<sup>75</sup>

Missionary William Knibb expressed the same idea in his statement before the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery. He mentioned that Catherine Williams had not complained to a magistrate about the flogging she had received for not complying with an overseer's sexual wishes because 'it would be the means of getting her into trouble.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *A General History*, 111.

<sup>73</sup> This verdict was for instance reached in the case of Eleanor Mead, who was given 58 lashes on the orders of her mistress, and that involving an overseer from Temple Hall who was accused of flogging a girl and confining her to the stocks. See Campbell, *Letter to Sir Robert Peel*, 53-54; and *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, February 1831, 135.

<sup>74</sup> *PP* 1831-31, vol. XVI, 230. Goderich referred here to the prosecution of Rev. G. W. Bridges. He made the same remark about the proceedings in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Jackson. See *PP* 1831-32, vol. XLVI, 387.

<sup>75</sup> Bickell, *The West Indies as They Are*, 31. The Council of Protection could order the 'hard labour, whipping or both' of women whose complaints had been found ungrounded. See *1826 Slave Law*, 11.

<sup>76</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 266.

Abolitionists, then, showed that the Slave Law afforded slave women only partial physical protection and that the machinery designed for their protection was useless. We have also seen in the foregoing chapter that abolitionists strongly focused on the law. For them, the law was the supreme rule of civil conduct. Jamaica could only become a truly free and civilised society, in their opinion, if all its inhabitants submitted themselves to the uniform and rational constraints of the law.<sup>77</sup> The remarks by Bickell and Knibb served above all to show that with full freedom and an impartial judiciary, black women would fulfil this condition. This particular notion of freedom featured also heavily in the abolitionist debate about male flogging. Even more prominent in this debate was the idea that freedom implied self-discipline, that is a free labourer required no physical coercion because an innate desire for self-improvement motivated him to work.<sup>78</sup> The fact that this idea was rarely expressed in the debate about female flogging is another indication that abolitionists expected slave women to withdraw from the field after emancipation.<sup>79</sup>

### **A Just Punishment for Unruly Women?**

Colonialists were of the opinion that slave women posed much more of a threat to the stability of the estates than men and that the use or threat of some form of punishment was necessary to manage them. For instance, the absentee planter Henry De La Beche concluded after a visit to his estate in the early 1820s that the women are 'more troublesome to manage than the men.'<sup>80</sup> Their views on the effectiveness of female

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<sup>77</sup> For more information on this abolitionist notion of freedom, see Holt, *The problem of Freedom*, 26.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., xxii.

<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, Wilberforce, *Appeal to the Religion*, 18.

<sup>80</sup> De La Beche, *Notes on the Condition*, 32.

flogging differed sharply, however. There were those who strongly disapproved of the practice and were keen to see it replaced by more 'decent' forms of punishment, while others argued that without it plantation discipline would be destroyed. Several absentee planters and various members of the pro-slavery lobby in England expressed the first opinion. It was not only triggered by abolitionist criticism but also by their conviction that West Indian enterprises would profit from a more civilised slave population. They regarded the public flogging of women in an almost naked state as much an impediment to slave civilisation as the lack of facilities to allow slave women to nurse properly or the sexual abuse committed by planters and their staff:

But we concur with Mr. Canning in thinking, that, 'one of the first principles of improvement in civilisation, is the observance paid to the difference of the sexes'; and we cannot but consider 'the shocking and unseemly practice of the chastisement of females by the whip,' as a bar to their moral improvement and civilisation, which is absolute necessary to remove.<sup>81</sup>

Having parts of their body exposed to the male gaze did not, in their opinion, allow slave women to develop the important feminine trait of 'delicacy or sensibility' and as such 'degraded' them. Solitary confinement, confinement in the stocks or even a light switching in private were put forward as the best means to keep the women under control and 'make them more feminine.'<sup>82</sup>

Their opinion about female flogging in a state of undress thus closely resembles that of the abolitionists. They also agreed with the abolitionists that the practice had the potential to foster 'unmanly dispositions' in the planters. Non-resident colonialists created a hierarchy of planters, with resident planters who sternly refused to exempt women from the lash at the bottom. These men were generally portrayed as

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<sup>81</sup> *Quarterly Review* 32, no. 64 (1825), 536.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

extremely insensitive to the suffering of their victims. The novel *Marly* mentioned, for instance, that they 'possessed feelings very different indeed from the generality of mankind.'<sup>83</sup> The middle rank consisted of planters who modified the practice or exempted certain categories of women from the lash. The top was formed by (absentee) planters like Henry De La Beche and Monk Lewis who had 'voluntarily and successfully' abolished female flogging.<sup>84</sup> The latter tried very hard to emerge as a 'man of feeling'. He wrote, for instance, in his diary that 'one must be an absolute brute not to feel unwilling to leave them subject to the lash.'<sup>85</sup> This group of 'enlightened' colonialists agreed, in other words, with the abolitionists that female flogging had a corrupting influence. They did not argue, however, that this influence stretched beyond the victim and her white perpetrator. As they were of the opinion that the civilisation of the slave community depended on the elevation of slave women, they paid no attention to the ways in which female flogging affected the slave men who watched the event or performed the flogging. In fact, it can be argued that their omission of the effects of female flogging on male slaves reflects their concern to prevent slave men from exercising their proper gender roles. The institution of slavery, which benefited them in various ways, would cease to exist if slave men adhered to the metropolitan ideal of responsible and independent masculinity. Since there was no ideal that women should be independent, 'enlightened' colonialists were less reluctant to articulate the idea that slave women should to some extent live up to the metropolitan ideal of womanhood and even put into practice measures to facilitate it.

The opinion of the 'enlightened' colonialists finds its expression in the request of the West India Committee in June 1823 to the local legislatures in the West

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<sup>83</sup> *Marly*, 156.

Indies to issue a ban on female flogging.<sup>86</sup> This had as much impact on the Jamaican House of Assembly as the request of the Secretary of State, Lord Bathurst, in the same month to adopt 'legislative measures for preventing the punishment of flogging in every case where the offender is a woman.'<sup>87</sup> During the following two years, the Secretary of State regularly ordered the colonial governor to address the Assembly on the issue of female flogging.<sup>88</sup> This was to some extent the result of active lobbying by the West India Committee who regarded grand scale amelioration without delay as the best means to head off the abolitionist drive towards immediate emancipation. They regularly expressed the opinion that the government should encourage the local legislatures to replace female flogging by more decent forms of punishment.<sup>89</sup> The Jamaican legislature, however, remained deaf to calls for a ban on female flogging. In 1824 it dismissed the bill of the Order in Council for Trinidad which replaced female flogging by solitary confinement and punishment by stocks, by stating firmly that female flogging in a state of undress should be allowed.<sup>90</sup> And while the Colonial Office's order to reconsider the Order in Council in 1826 led to a clause to encourage slave marriage and various other ameliorative clauses, it failed to establish a ban on

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, *Quarterly Review* 32, no. 64 (1825) 537.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis, *Journal of a West India Planter*, 119.

<sup>86</sup> Minutes of Planters and Merchants 25 June 1823, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, West India Committee. In April 1823, a subcommittee drew up a plan for amelioration, which included measures that were similar to those put forward by the Canning government in May 1823. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 81.

<sup>87</sup> *PP* 1824, vol. XXIV, 443. This was another reform proposal put forward by the Canning government in May 1823. Like the proposal to facilitate slave marriage, it was rejected on the grounds that it 'violated the constitution of the colony.' Various other local legislatures refused to pass a ban. For the Barbados legislature's attitude towards female flogging, see Beckles, *Natural Rebels*, 39-42.

<sup>88</sup> *PP* 1826, vol. XXIX, 11-12.

<sup>89</sup> See the call in *Quarterly Review* 32, no. 64 (1825), 537. The West India Committee was extremely active in the 1820s and early 1830s. It defended the slave system in a variety of pamphlets, periodicals, such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and its own journal, *The West India Reporter*. Like the abolitionist movement, it also organised lecture tours and held rallies. See Ragatz, *Fall of the Planter Class*, 426-29 and 447-49.

<sup>90</sup> Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 433. For the Order in Council, see *PP* 1826-27, vol. XXV, 76-77.



female flogging.<sup>91</sup> In 1828 after various attempts to change the Assembly's attitude, the governor informed the Secretary of State that the Assembly would never adopt a ban on female flogging as it was of the opinion that there was no other punishment for women that promised the 'same salutary dread.' He mentioned furthermore that the Assembly did not even consider a clause that would forbid the flogging in a naked state because it was convinced that slave women did not have 'the sense of shame that distinguishes European females.'<sup>92</sup> Similar arguments were used by the Assembly to dismiss the 1833 bill on female flogging put forward by its member August Beaumont, then a newspaper proprietor.<sup>93</sup>

Throughout the 1820s and early 1830s various resident planters and some 'hard-line' colonialists in England echoed the Assembly's opinion that the stability and productivity of the plantations depended on female flogging.<sup>94</sup> They defended the practice first of all by arguing that slave women were inherent troublemakers. Former resident and planter Robert Scott told the 1832 Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery that if the practice were abolished, the women would become 'excessively troublesome; they are, generally speaking, much worse to manage than the men.'<sup>95</sup> Some lent support to this claim by arguing that slave women tried to get out of their deserving punishments. For instance, Admiral Flemming, who was stationed in the island in the late 1820s, mentioned that many women tried to avoid punishment by accusing their overseers of sexual abuse.<sup>96</sup> A second but less often articulated argument was that flogging served to civilise slave women. Anthony Davis, for

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<sup>91</sup> *PP* 1826-27, vol. XXV, 117.

<sup>92</sup> *PP* 1828, vol. XXVII, 110.

<sup>93</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 224. The bill was accompanied by two other far-reaching measures: compulsory manumission; and the establishment of a committee to investigate emancipation.

<sup>94</sup> Several of these resident planters, however, applied an element of moderation. They substituted, for instance, the whip by rods. See [Davis], *The West Indies*, 65; and Jackson, *Memoir*, 113.

<sup>95</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XX, 337.

<sup>96</sup> *Evidence upon Oath*, 37.

example, told his readers in 1832 that flogging was not only a means to enforce labour and create stability but also a way 'to correct the vices and abuses practised by the slaves among themselves, to the injury of others.'<sup>97</sup> In other words, the practice was justified by drawing upon the 'old' stereotypes of slave women as troublemakers and scheming Jezebels.

The 'hard-line' colonialists tried very hard to combat abolitionist accusations regarding the severity and indecency of the practice and slave women's lack of legal protection against excessive flogging. It was argued that female flogging was always very moderate. Cynric Williams mentioned, for instance, that the four lashes that a slave girl on Orange Grove was given over her clothes could not have given 'her any bodily pain.'<sup>98</sup> Like some abolitionists, he also used the women's bodies as a means to reveal the 'truth' about the practice. In his opinion, female flogging was mild because the bodies of the women he had seen bathing in Turtle Crawl had not had 'a mark' or a 'scratch.'<sup>99</sup> As to the accusation that the practice degraded the women, some argued that hardly any part of the body was exposed. One planter mentioned in his refutation of Thomas Cooper's *Facts Illustrative of the Condition of Negro Slaves* that the body was 'always partly covered, and not left naked as a statue.'<sup>100</sup> Others went even further and tried to justify the indecent nature of the practice. They argued that the women were so far removed from mankind that they did not have enough sense of decency to feel morally degraded by being flogged in a state of undress.<sup>101</sup>

Extracts from court reports were provided to disclaim the argument that slave women were only partially protected against excessive cruelty. Alexander Barclay, for

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<sup>97</sup> [Davis], *The West Indies*, 59.

<sup>98</sup> Williams, *Tour through the Island*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 296-97.

<sup>100</sup> *State of Society and Slavery in Jamaica: In a Reply to an Article in the Edinburgh Review* (London, 1824), 9. For similar remarks, see *Evidence upon Oath*, 17; and Williams, *Tour through the Island*, 13.

<sup>101</sup> *Quarterly Review* 32, no. 64 (1825), 536.

instance, mentioned that as a result of an investigation by a Council of Protection planter Joseph Boyden had been tried in a court of law for physically abusing one of his slave women. The court had found him guilty and had sentenced him to six months of imprisonment.<sup>102</sup> As such extracts could lead to the conclusion that slave women knew their legal rights and hence that the slaves' legal rights could be safely extended, some 'hard-line' colonialists provided accounts to show that slave women were prone to abuse their legal rights. Anthony Davis included in his *The West Indies* the conversation between a slave mother, an overseer and an attorney. The mother claimed that the overseer had punished her daughter, showing the attorney the 'wale across the back of the girl's neck.' The overseer, however, claimed that it was the result of 'a blow of switch' she had received while playing with a boy. Their arguments led the attorney to address the whole slave congregation. He told them:

The laws, which were intended for your protection, are converted to this infamous purpose! The children mothers, and old people among you, are put forward as the leaders of this conspiracy, knowing that they are protected! shame, shame upon you.<sup>103</sup>

An even more direct refutation of slave women's ability to understand the law and submit to it was given by the magistrate who led the Council of Protection in the case of Kate and Ann Whitfield. He mentioned that the women's complaint had been 'vexatious and frivolous.'<sup>104</sup>

Not surprisingly, the 'hard-line' colonialists tried hard to combat the argument that white Jamaicans failed to live up to the metropolitan gender norms. In his account

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<sup>102</sup> Barclay, *Practical View*, 76. This court case from 1818 was not the best to combat the abolitionist argument because the judge had reduced the prison sentence on the grounds of 'insufficient proof of excessive flogging.'

<sup>103</sup> [Davis], *The West Indies*, 35.

<sup>104</sup> *PP* 1831-32, vol. XLVII, 367. The magistrate was the brother of the accused, Mr. Jackson.

of the Joseph Boyden trial, Alexander Barclay presented Jamaican planters most clearly as 'men of feeling':

If those who had been led to believe that there is no proper feeling in the colonies, witnessed the indignation at the conduct of the criminal, which prevailed in the court-house of Kingston that day, it would have satisfied them that Englishmen in Jamaica are not so different from Englishmen at home, or so callous to the ill-treatment of the negroes, as some persons are anxious to believe.<sup>105</sup>

Although there were exceptions such as Boyden, it was generally argued that planters were able to keep their propensity to aggression under control. Cynric Williams mentioned, for example, that a planter had refused to give a girl extra lashes for the various rude remarks she had made towards him during the flogging.<sup>106</sup> As to the mistress, she was presented as the epitome of femininity. According to former resident John Stewart, she was an 'affectionate wife', 'tender mother', 'dear friend', and 'agreeable companion.'<sup>107</sup> Her recourse to the whip in the superintendence of her female domestics did not make her, in their opinion, less of a domestic manager than the middle-class mistress in the metropolitan society. In fact, it was argued that she treated her female domestics with the utmost care and respect. Dr. William Sells mentioned, for instance, that she did not flog without scruple.<sup>108</sup> And in her statement before the Council of Protection investigating the abuse of Kate and Ann Whitfield, Mary Elizabeth Jupp argued that Mrs. Jackson had acted like a mother towards the women. She had, for instance, offered Kate medicine and had regularly examined the stocks and had turned them round so that they would not hurt the women's legs.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Barclay, *Practical View*, 75.

<sup>106</sup> Williams, *Tour through the Island*, 13.

<sup>107</sup> [Stewart], *Account of Jamaica*, 152.

<sup>108</sup> Sells, *Remarks on the Condition*, 39.

<sup>109</sup> PP 1831-32, vol. XLVIII, 380-81. It was the confinement in the stocks more than the flogging that eventually led to a bill of indictment against Mr. Jackson.

## Conclusions

Humanitarian reform was the name given to a large number of middle-class movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that aimed to achieve the individuality and autonomy of various groups of people as well as a general reform of the manners and morals of the nation. It identified a range of formerly unquestioned social practices as unacceptable cruelties, such as blood sports and public executions. The antislavery movement was part of humanitarian reform. Its campaigns centred like those of other reform movements upon pain and suffering. It provided, as we have seen, vivid descriptions of the floggings and the wounded female body that concentrated upon three actors: the victim, the practitioner, and the spectator. The infliction of pain on the slave woman's body, it was argued, debased each of them. It deadened the feelings of the practitioner and the spectator and aroused in them a taste for cruelty, while it destroyed the victim's self-respect.<sup>110</sup> The narratives of female suffering were a means to arouse popular opposition to slavery. They also served to teach the readers virtue by softening their hearts and eliciting tears of sympathy.<sup>111</sup> To avoid the charge that their own sensibilities and hence virtue had been blunted, or worse that their spectatorship had generated in them a taste for cruelty, abolitionists provided descriptions of their own emotional response to the scenes of suffering they described. Some mentioned that they had been unable to watch the spectacle, while

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<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of the role of pain and suffering in humanitarian reform, see Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism'; and T. W. Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details and the Humanitarian Narrative', in L. Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 176-204. On abolitionism as a humanitarian reform movement, see R. McGowen, 'Power and Humanity, or Foucault Among the Historians', in C. Jones and R. Porter, eds., *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1994), 91-112.

<sup>111</sup> For the influence of the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility on humanitarian reform see Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 224-31.

others demonstrated their sensibility by omitting the more disgusting details of the flogging.<sup>112</sup>

The 'enlightened' colonialists engaged with the humanitarian reformers' discourse of suffering. They also expressed the opinion that female flogging debased the slave woman and her perpetrator. Descriptions of the latter and their abolition of the practice served to show that they were 'men of feeling'. Their proposals to replace female flogging by solitary confinement and confinement in the stocks drew as much as the abolitionist demands to ban female flogging on the campaign for penal reform. This campaign advocated secluded punishment because it did not legitimise the open expression of dangerous passions or inflict needless pain. By the late 1820s, it had succeeded in replacing the traditional penalties that had made up the entire arsenal of Georgian criminal sentences (the pillory, the whipping post, the gallows and the convict ship) by more private and measured forms of punishment that calmed and reformed rather than inflamed the offender.<sup>113</sup>

Even the 'hard-line' colonialists were influenced by the discourse of human suffering. They tried very hard to deny the abolitionist accusation that female flogging had blunted their feelings. They did this not only by providing accounts that showed that the whipping was very mild and that there were mechanisms in place to protect the women against excessive cruelty but also by modifying the practice. The accusation that these colonialists tried to deny was part of a larger accusation that abolitionists launched at Jamaican planters, their wives and their estate officers, namely that they did not live up to the metropolitan ideals of manhood and

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<sup>112</sup> These rhetorical strategies were not unique to the abolitionists. Halttunen mentions several other strategies adopted by humanitarian reformers to avoid not only the charge that their own sensibilities had been blunted by watching the event but also the claim that their narratives inflicted terrible moral damage on the readers. 'Humanitarianism', 328-29.

<sup>113</sup> M. J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law and Policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 93 and 100.

womanhood. This shows most clearly that the abolitionist attempts to free the slaves was part of a much wider project, the aim of which was a profound transformation of British slave colonies.

Abolitionists argued in the debate about female flogging that a drastic reform of the manners and morals of Jamaica required more than a change in the islanders' gender roles. It also required that they adopt a different relationship to power: one that protected the body, fostered sexual morality and revered the law. They conveyed the lesson that a wrong relationship to power changes human nature for the worse. Slavery had given masters and mistresses the temptation to abuse power. They had done so and as result their sensibilities had been severely distorted. This lesson was not only conveyed through vivid depictions of masters and mistresses inflicting or supervising the flogging of slave women but also through accounts that demonstrated that slave women were only partially protected against gross abuse. Planters effected laws and passed judgements that enabled them to exert absolute power over the slave population. Abolitionists excused them to some extent, however, by arguing that all human beings had the propensity to abuse power. This argument was most clearly articulated in the accounts of slave drivers who willingly submitted slave women to the lash.<sup>114</sup>

The debate about female flogging did not create new images of slave women. Abolitionists sustained their arguments with images of potentially virtuous slave women. They caricatured the women as much as in the other debates as emblems of helpless innocence, among others by denying them a voice and concentrating upon the marks on their bodies. The colonialist debate relied upon a variety of images. The potentially virtuous slave woman sustained the 'enlightened' colonialists' remarks.

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<sup>114</sup> For more information on the abolitionist concept of power, see McGowen, 'Power and Humanity'.

The 'hard-line' colonialists drew upon images that emphasised slave women's difference. The inherent troublemaker and scheming Jezebel justified their attempts to prevent a ban on female flogging, while their refusal to grant slave women more protection against physical abuse was supported by an image which suggested that slave women lacked the degree of intelligence of English women. The images that the two groups of colonialists presented of white Jamaicans also differed. The 'enlightened' colonialists presented them as overwhelmingly savage and barbarous, while 'hard-line' colonialists depicted them as extremely civilised men and women. Their different images of slave women and white Jamaicans not only stemmed from the fact that they lived in different societies but also from the fact that by the mid-1820s they held different ideas about the best way to defend the institution of slavery. The 'enlightened' colonialists decided that only grand scale amelioration would head off the abolitionist drive towards immediate emancipation, while the 'hard-line' colonialists were convinced that attack was the best form of defence.



## CHAPTER 7 SLAVERY BY ANOTHER NAME

Clause XVII of the 1833 Abolition Act forbade planters to punish their former slaves. Apprentices who had committed an offence against their employer had to be brought before a S.M. As S.M.s were not allowed to punish female apprentices by whipping or beating, they usually sentenced them to hard labour in the workhouse.<sup>1</sup> The workhouses were under the control of the Custos (the chief magistrate) and justices of the parish who had the power to appoint the supervisor and other officers and devise the rules and regulations. To ensure that the officers adhered to the regulations, workhouse committees appointed Visiting Local Magistrates (V.L.M.s). These men had to inspect the workhouse on a regular basis and order the punishment of inmates who had disobeyed the rules.<sup>2</sup>

As existing workhouses could not deal with the influx of so many apprentices, new workhouses were built from January 1835 onwards, while existing workhouses were enlarged. Around the same time most institutions adopted the treadmill, that is a giant wheel with a series of steps propelled by the inmates' climbing motion.<sup>3</sup> From the beginning of 1835, then, most female apprentices were sentenced to a combination of hard labour in the penal gang and the treadmill. Around six o'clock in the morning they were taken out of their dormitories and put on the treadmill for a period of fifteen minutes. Women who failed to keep step were given a severe flogging. Thereafter

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<sup>1</sup> *PP* 1833, vol. IV, 217-18. A return of punishments between August 1834 and August 1835 shows that most apprentices were sentenced for 'neglect of duty', 'disobedience' and 'insolence'. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 560.

<sup>2</sup> Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 74-75; Burn, *Emancipation*, 279-80; and *PP* 1835, vol. XV, 506-34. The members of the workhouse committees and the V.L.M.'s were mostly planters and other prominent members of the local plantocracy.

<sup>3</sup> The House of Assembly legislated for these changes on the advice of governor Sligo. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 193; and *PP* 1835, vol. L, 73. The first workhouses were erected in the 1770s. They

they were chained 'two in two' and taken to the field or street where they were employed by local planters or the representative local government in works such as cutting cane. The women returned to the workhouse around five o'clock in the afternoon when they did another session on the mill.<sup>4</sup>

It was from the workhouse that the most horrible stories of the Apprenticeship System came. For the abolitionists, the workhouse symbolised the planters' violation of the Abolition Act. Of all the brutalities practised in the institution, the flogging of female inmates troubled them most. Former governor Sligo referred to it as 'the most palpable and barefaced violation of the abolition law.'<sup>5</sup> The first section analyses the moral and legal objections that abolitionists put forward against flogging and three other disciplinary practices that female inmates were subjected to and also addresses their attempts to end them.

S.M.s, the colonial governor and the Secretary of State were as outraged as the abolitionists about these practices. The second section outlines the strategies they adopted to combat them, which ranged from persuading workhouse committees to amend their rules to demands for imperial legislation. In addition, it describes and explains the responses of resident planters and their supporters to these attempts. These can be found in the reports from: the House of Assembly; the workhouse committees; the 1836 Select Committee; and the Daughtrey and Gordon Commission. The latter deals with the St. Ann workhouse and consists of statements by former inmates, officers and magistrates. The Commission was set up in September 1837 by governor Lionel Smith at the request of the Colonial Office in order to assess

housed runaway slaves, slaves privately committed by their owners, and slaves given prison sentences by the courts. See Paton, 'Punishment', 936.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the experience of female apprentices in the workhouses, see my article 'Slavery by Another Name: Apprenticed Women in Jamaican workhouses in the Period 1834-38', *Social History* 26, 1 (2001), 39-59.

<sup>5</sup>[Sligo], *Jamaica*, 27.

allegations about abuse mentioned in the abolitionist pamphlet *A Narrative of Events since the First of August 1834 by James Williams* (1837).<sup>6</sup> This was, however, not the first investigation into the workings of the workhouses. In 1836 the workhouses of St. Andrew, St. Catherine and St. John were subjected to investigation. The second section will also draw upon the reports of these investigations.

The final section links the debate about female abuse in the workhouse to the campaign for penal reform in the metropolitan society and locates it within the wider debate about transforming slave societies into free labour economies. It also sums up the images of apprenticed women that sustained the debate and explains why abolitionists were so outraged about the mode of punishment that had replaced the public and indecent floggings.

### **'Repugnant to Every Feeling of Humanity'<sup>7</sup>**

It was not until 1836 that abolitionists began to address the abuse of female apprentices in the workhouses. Their concern was first of all triggered by the report of the Select Committee on the Apprenticeship. Completed in August 1836 and limited to Jamaica, it mentioned 24 cases of female flogging that had taken place in various workhouses since August 1834 and also stated that female inmates were subjected to chaining and that their hair was cut off upon entering the institution. The report sharply criticised the practices and suggested that a 'strict inquiry' should be carried out into all alleged cases of abuse. Although most witnesses had shown that the practices were not in accordance with the Abolition Act, the Committee did not call

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on the Commission, see Burn, *Emancipation*, 256-60.

for an amendment of the latter as it was of the opinion that 'measures had already been taken to prevent the recurrence of the violation.'<sup>8</sup>

Another factor that led abolitionists to address the issue were bad reports about the Apprenticeship System from missionaries and residents in the island which were sent to them from mid-1835 onwards. These reports stated that female inmates were flogged on a large scale and suffered major injuries from the treadmill. One of the most active reporters was the Baptist missionary William Knibb. In one of his letters to Mr. Dyer, the secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, he mentioned that a female member of his congregation had been 'tied on the wheel and severely flogged' whilst pregnant. Knibb not only related such instances of female suffering but also asked Mr. Dyer and others to undertake action on behalf of the women. He asked Mr. Dyer, for instance, to find out whether it was legal to work female inmates in chains.<sup>9</sup>

The accounts of female suffering that were published from 1836 onwards concentrated upon four disciplinary practices that female inmates of workhouses were subjected to: the mill, flogging for not keeping step, chaining, and the cutting off of hair. James Williams's narrative and the report of the Daughtrey and Gordon Commission show that female inmates faced far more dehumanising practices. They were exposed to hunger and a lack of medical care as well as a comprehensive set of rules similar to those of English penal institutions at the time, such as the rule that forbade inmates to speak to one another while at work or on the mill.<sup>10</sup> Abolitionists concentrated upon the four practices as they left ineffaceable markings on the

<sup>7</sup> Governor Sligo's description of the flogging of female inmates as cited in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, and 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7. The Anti-Slavery Society was extremely disappointed in the report. Four abolitionists went to the West Indies in the autumn of 1836 to investigate the workings of the Apprenticeship System for themselves: Sturge, Harvey, Lloyd and Scoble. Their investigations resulted in two books. For more information on the Select Committee and these investigations, see Burn, *Emancipation*, 333-42; and Gratus, *Great White Lie*, 242-45.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Mr. Dyer cited in J. H. Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb: Missionary in Jamaica* (London, 1847), 232. See also the letters of the Baptist missionary Thomas Burchell to his brother in W. F. Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell: Twenty-Two Years a Missionary in Jamaica* (London, 1849).

women's bodies. The wounded bodies had to convince the reader that because planters and their supporters violated the Abolition Act, the Apprenticeship System was nothing but 'a first cousin' to slavery.<sup>11</sup> They also served to show that the contract between the planters and parliament was a most immoral contract.

### *Immoral Practices*

The change in the women's legal and social position led abolitionists to adopt new rhetorical strategies to encourage the readers to undertake action on behalf of the sufferer and focus more on the illegality than the immorality of the practices. There was, however, also much continuity in the abolitionist debate about female physical abuse. Most abolitionists continued to rely upon the use of rich layers of detail to arouse the readers' sympathy. One of the most gruesome descriptions of abuse can be found in Henry Sterne's *A Statement of Facts Submitted to the Right Hon. Lord Glenelg* (1837) which relates among others the author's experiences as a member of the jury investigating the death of Anna Maria Thompson in St. George workhouse in August 1835. Sterne mentioned that at first sight the body had not shown signs of physical abuse. It was only after the body was turned over and the clothes were removed that he had noticed that 'her neck, back and shoulders down to her spine, were most dreadfully lacerated from flogging.'<sup>12</sup> Abolitionists also continued to directly address the readers. Sturge and Harvey asked them, for instance, to 'balance the severity and degradation of the treadmill and the chain gang with the punishments

<sup>10</sup> The rules of fifteen workhouses were reprinted in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 506-34.

<sup>11</sup> Lloyd, *Letters from the West Indies*, 164.

<sup>12</sup> H. Stern, *A Statement of Facts Submitted to the Right Hon. Lord Glenelg* (London, 1837), 247. For other horrid descriptions, see *Statement and Observations on the Workings of the Laws for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies* (London, 1836), 32; *Horrors*, 10; and Hodgson, *Truths from the West Indies*, 322.

by which the unrequited labour of females was formerly extorted.<sup>13</sup> The two men also relied upon another 'old' rhetorical strategy: a focus on pregnant and nursing women. This strategy also played a prominent role in the travel account of the American abolitionists Thome and Kimball. They provided among others the harrowing account of a woman in St. Andrew workhouse who 'danced' the mill, while her two-month-old baby lay unattended on the floor.<sup>14</sup>

Like before 1834, abolitionists seldom mentioned instances of women resisting the degrading disciplinary practices. This led as much as the detailed descriptions of the wounded bodies and the infliction of pain to the portrayal of apprenticed women as suffering victims.<sup>15</sup> The new strategy that abolitionists adopted to encourage action - the inclusion of the women's voice - did not counteract this image because the women emphasised the dehumanising nature of the workhouse regime.<sup>16</sup> This strategy affirmed the change in the women's status from chattels to persons with legal rights and duties. This was also achieved by treating the women less as an aggregate. Many abolitionists described individual cases of abuse, clearly stating the woman's name or at least the estate she lived on.<sup>17</sup>

The narratives of female suffering continued furthermore to rely upon three groups of actors. The actors, however, differed. There were still 'victims' and 'perpetrators' but no longer 'spectators'. This was partly due to the fact that most of the abuse took place within the walls of the institution. Large numbers of men, however,

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<sup>13</sup> Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 336. This strategy was also applied by Thome and Kimball in their *Emancipation*.

<sup>14</sup> Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation*, 91. The term 'dance' was commonly used to describe the women's exercise on the treadmill.

<sup>15</sup> There is plenty of evidence that apprenticed women strongly resisted the disciplinary practices. Leanty Thomas's daughter, for instance, begged the supervisor to give her mother time to catch up on the mill. See *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 194.

<sup>16</sup> This strategy features prominently in the travel accounts of Sturge and Harvey and Thome and Kimball.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the account of the abuse suffered by Sarah Murdoch in *Statement of Facts*, 11-12.

witnessed the suffering of the women: the male inmates.<sup>18</sup> James Williams mentioned that the second time he was committed to St. Ann workhouse:

There was plenty of woman there, but only one have young child, that was Elizabeth Mason, from Mount Campbell; she was in for seven days to dance the treadmill; she not able to dance good; after she had been on little time, she miss step and drop, and hang by her two wrists; then the boatswain flog her with the cat, as hard as he could put it; then she try to fetch up and catch the step, but fall again, and them keep on flog; and when they tire of flogging, then they let her alone, and let the mill go on mashing her legs; all the skin was bruise off her shins, and her legs cut up with the cat.<sup>19</sup>

The absence of these 'spectators' is an indication that abolitionists were less concerned about gender roles in the 1834-1838 debate. 'Facilitators' who played the dominant role in the narratives replaced the 'spectators'. This was a very mixed group of actors, consisting of S.M.s, workhouse committee members, Assemblymen, and members of the island's judiciary.

As to the victims, abolitionists continued to argue that the physical abuse prevented the women from developing the virtues that they needed to carry out their role as 'moral regenerator', such as chastity, modesty and self-respect.<sup>20</sup> Women from the Sheffield Association for the Universal Abolition of Slavery mentioned in 1837 that female inmates were 'scorned, polluted, ruined, both for time and eternity.'<sup>21</sup> Such conclusions were largely based on the fact that when the women 'danced' the mill, they were partly naked. They wore a 'coarse Osnaburgh shift with short sleeves,

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<sup>18</sup> Male apprentices were usually punished on the estate by means of flogging, switching and solitary confinement. For more serious offences they were sent to hard labour or solitary confinement in the workhouse. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 562.

<sup>19</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 159. The pamphlet is being reprinted with an introduction by Diana Paton. It shows that there was no clear segregation in the workhouse between male and female inmates: they were on the mill together; worked often side by side in the field; and were sometimes even chained together. It provides an insight into the male apprentices' ideas about proper gender roles, as James Williams used a set of gender norms to criticise the disciplinary practices faced by the women.

<sup>20</sup> Although often used as a euphemism for chastity, modesty meant more than that. It was a general pattern of reserved behaviour and self-effacement. See Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 23.

half high in front and coming no lower than the waist' on top of a petticoat so that whenever a weight was lifted, their skin appeared between the shift and the petticoat.<sup>22</sup> Although the nudity was not a conscious policy, it led many abolitionists to agree with the Sheffield women that the mill was an extremely degrading form of female punishment. Sturge and Harvey mentioned, for instance, that it destroyed the women's 'decency.' They suggested that the mill would be a less degrading experience for women, if they were supplied with 'a suitable dress.'<sup>23</sup> S.M. William Oldrey provided another solution to the indecency of the mill. He suggested that female inmates should only be put on the mill in presence of a 'matron.' The supervisor of the workhouse in his district refused to adopt this proposal on the grounds that Oldrey lacked the authority to amend the workhouse rules.<sup>24</sup> It is also likely that he refused because he perceived the naked exposure of the bodies as an excellent means to control the female inmates. Statements by former female inmates of the St. Ann workhouse demonstrate most clearly that women felt extremely degraded by having parts of their body exposed to the gaze of the officers and that they tried to behave well in order to avoid extra time on the mill.<sup>25</sup>

Chaining was also seen to debase the women. Female inmates wore a collar that was put around the neck to which a chain was attached that went around their waist. It was only taken off when the women were put on the mill and on Sundays when they were employed in the yard. The Select Committee on the Apprenticeship argued that this practice had an 'injurious influence on the characters and feelings' of

<sup>21</sup> *An Appeal to the Christian Women of Sheffield from the Association for the Universal Abolition of Slavery* (Sheffield, 1837), 13.

<sup>22</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVI, 62.

<sup>23</sup> Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 155 and 219.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Burn, *Emancipation*, 284. Oldrey served as an anti-slavery witness before the 1836 Select Committee.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, the statements of Lavinia Reynolds, Mary Ann Saw, Eleanor Howell and Elizabeth Bartley in *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 152-269. The supervisor of this institution regularly ordered the



the women as it lessened their 'self-respect'; a virtue which it regarded 'of the highest importance to maintain, or when it does not exist, to create.'<sup>26</sup> Former governor Sligo was of the opinion that it was not only the wearing of the horrific collar and chains that prevented female apprentices from developing important feminine virtues but also the inmates to which they were chained:

If she has been heretofore pure in her conduct, the chances are strongly in favour of her being *corrupted by the vices of her companions* [emphasis mine]. Once seen among the criminals in the streets, disgrace attaches to her name, though she has really been guilty of no offence, except one of the most trifling nature . . . yet, for this cause, she is made to associate with the vilest criminals of the chain gang.<sup>27</sup>

Abolitionists in this period, however, were less concerned about the morally corrupting effects of the punishments on the victims than the physical suffering that they caused. The old slogan 'an outrage against all decency' was replaced by 'a torturing outrage.'<sup>28</sup> The mill and flogging in particular were presented as torturing experiences for the women.<sup>29</sup> Flogging was extremely painful as it was practically inflicted on bare skin, while the mill injured many women as the construction was such that those who could not keep up hung with their hands in the straps while the keen side of the steps revolved against their bodies, knees and legs.<sup>30</sup> The pamphlet *Statements and Observations* (1836) conveyed the impact of the mill on the health of the women most clearly in its account of an apprentice who was sentenced to the mill while she was far advanced in pregnancy. After a spell on the mill, she miscarried and

women to tie their skirts up so that even a greater part of their bodies was exposed when they were on the mill. Extra time on the mill was a common punishment for disobeying the workhouse rules.

<sup>26</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 7.

<sup>27</sup> [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Bevan, *Operation*, 43. The focus on the severity of the practices was a means to arouse opposition to the Apprenticeship System. It was also caused by the fact that the punishments were at odds with those that were inflicted on female prisoners in the metropolitan society.

<sup>29</sup> Some abolitionists argued that the cropping off of hair also caused physical suffering. See [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 23; and Oldrey's statement in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 171.

ten days after returning home with her 'legs dreadfully bruised, and her whole frame bespeaking the utmost wretchedness', she died.<sup>31</sup>

The four disciplinary practices were also referred to as 'inhuman'. This term captured not only their severity but also the fact that they undid the change that had taken place in the women's legal status. As chains were the ultimate symbol of bonded labour, it is not surprising that abolitionists condemned chaining far more on the grounds of its denial of the women's new status than its indecent or torturing nature.<sup>32</sup> One S.M. described it, for instance, as a 'savage and disgusting custom.'<sup>33</sup> Sligo regularly invoked the term 'inhuman' in his discussion of female flogging. While it referred mostly to the fact that the floggings were extremely painful, he also used it to point out that they undermined what he considered to be the purpose of the workhouse: to aid the transformation of the former slave society into a free labour economy. As the floggings violated an important right that the women had recently acquired, they did not allow them to develop a sense of respect for the law. They also prevented the development of another important attribute of free labourers: self-discipline.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to note that while Sligo condemned flogging, chaining and also the cutting off of hair on the grounds that they were illegal practices and debased both the victim and her perpetrator, he was firmly convinced that time and labour in the

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed account of how the mill injured the women, see *Horrors*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Statements and Observations*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> On the torturing nature of chaining, see the statement of Alexander Beaumont in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 268.

<sup>33</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 127. Captain Pringle, who carried out an investigation into the Jamaican workhouses in 1838, used similar terms. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 288.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 47; *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 46; and [Sligo], Jamaica, 27-30. During his time in office, Sligo regularly asked abolitionists in England to undertake action to ensure that the Apprenticeship would correspond with the ideal described in the Abolition Act. In July 1835, for instance, he sent Lord Suffield information about female flogging and asked him to use it without mentioning its source. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 335.

workhouse was a 'salutary mode' of female punishment.<sup>35</sup> It gave female apprentices grounding in freedom as it taught them to fulfil their part of the Apprenticeship contract and to submit to the constraints of the law.<sup>36</sup> He supported his argument with images of apprenticed women as troublesome workers and lawbreakers. In December 1834 he tried to persuade the House of Assembly to legislate for the adoption of the treadmill in the island's workhouses by arguing that female apprentices were 'more troublesome than men' because there were 'no treadmills or other places of confinement yet in existence' for them. He argued, in other words, that the women abused the fact that S.M.s were at a loss to punish them.<sup>37</sup> In April 1835, he informed the Secretary of State that female inmates regularly threw themselves off the mill and 'refused to work out their sentences.'<sup>38</sup> Thus contrary to most abolitionists, Sligo did not render female apprentices invisible as workers. In fact, his assumption that the workhouse could transform them into more docile labourers suggests that he believed that the success of the Apprenticeship System depended on their labour.<sup>39</sup>

As to the pernicious influence of the disciplinary practices on the perpetrators (the workhouse officers), it was argued that they were hardened and debased by them, turning them into tyrants or worse. The free-coloured newspaper *The Watchman* mentioned that

the supervisor is in some cases so accustomed to his work and *hardened* [emphasis mine] in it, that not only can he stand with the utmost torpidity but

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<sup>35</sup> *PP* 1835, vol. L, 73.

<sup>36</sup> Thus like the repayment of time lost in carrying out maternal duties, it would teach the women about the contract notion on which the free labour economy was based.

<sup>37</sup> *PP* 1835, vol. L, 73.

<sup>38</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 63.

<sup>39</sup> In 1834 and 1835 Sligo was far more concerned to ensure that the Apprenticeship System did not destroy the estates than to protect and enhance the apprentices' newly acquired rights. The emphasis shifted during the last year of his governorship. See Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 90-94.

appears to *enjoy a fiend-like gratification* [emphasis mine] in adding to the distress of the afflicted.<sup>40</sup>

Abolitionists continued to provide lessons in the proper relationship to power in their accounts of the perpetrators. The driver, mostly a black long-term convict, was presented as the antithesis to benevolent power.<sup>41</sup> He willingly flogged the women and often did it without having the authority to do so. With full freedom almost within reach, abolitionists considered it even more important for the women to be chaste. It is therefore not surprising that they were especially concerned about the fact that drivers used their power to force female inmates to have sex with them. Captain Studholme Hodgson mentioned that many young female inmates had submitted to the 'brutal passions' of their drivers, hoping to receive better treatment.<sup>42</sup> To convince his readers of the women's ability to be chaste, he mentioned that most women did not entertain the drivers' offers but 'preferred torture' instead.<sup>43</sup>

The higher-rank officers' relationship to power was also presented as incorrect. Although such officers also often exceeded their authority, abolitionists concentrated far more upon the fact that they served as 'subordinates of the magistracy'.<sup>44</sup> In his letters to the Secretary of State, Sligo regularly mentioned that these officers carried out a regime, which they thought local planters would appreciate. In June 1836, he informed Lord Glenelg that many supervisors had adopted an 'additional and most illegal rule': namely, to put all inmates on the mill, including those who had been

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<sup>40</sup> Cited in *Statements and Observations*, 33. The newspaper had been instrumental in ending slavery by siding with the abolitionists and attacking the caste system of the island. See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, 98. For other striking accounts of the impact of the practices on the officers' sensibility, see *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 63; and *Statement of Facts*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Only a few workhouses employed paid white drivers.

<sup>42</sup> Hodgson, *Truth from the West Indies*, 322. See also [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Various witnesses before the Daughtrey and Gordon Commission confirmed Hodgson's conclusion that only a small number of women consented to the drivers' wishes. See *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 174-75, 178 and 196.

<sup>44</sup> [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 20.

sentenced to hard labour only.<sup>45</sup> To convince his readers that workhouse officers enabled planters to retain much of their arbitrary power, Henry Sterne mentioned that one of the officers of St. George workhouse had honoured the wish of planter John Bell to flog his female workers severely. Like many abolitionists before him, Sterne invoked the female body to support his argument. He mentioned that he had seen Bell's female apprentices at work in the penal gang with their 'backs bare, and blood running from some, with marks of severe flogging.'<sup>46</sup>

Even more implicated than the workhouse officers in the planters' attempts to regain some of the power they had lost under the Abolition Act were, according to the abolitionists, large number of S.M.s and workhouse committee members. Only a few abolitionists mentioned that there were S.M.s who carried out the disciplinary wishes of local planters. Henry Sterne mentioned, for instance, that John Bell had been able to persuade S.M. Fishbourne to commit thirteen of his female apprentices to the workhouse.<sup>47</sup> The majority presented them as assistants of the planters by providing examples of decisions they had taken that had failed to acknowledge the women's new status, such as sending women far advanced in pregnancy to the workhouse and ordering extremely severe punishments for trivial offences.<sup>48</sup> Sturge and Harvey suggested in their report that 'Buckra Magistrates' had committed the majority of the women in the island's workhouses. They mentioned, for example, the case of Mary Saunders. Shortly after Mary had bought the remainder of her Apprenticeship, her employer had appealed to the governor and she had not received a 'free paper.' Her appeal to the governor a year later had triggered a warrant by the S.M. and she had been committed to the workhouse as a runaway while heavily pregnant. Sturge and

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<sup>45</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 46.

<sup>46</sup> *Statement of Facts*, 216.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> For more information on planter-friendly S.M.s, see Burn, *Emancipation*, 220-30.

Harvey had met her in the workhouse two days after she had delivered her tenth child and concluded that 'the supervisor appeared to have done all he could to palliate, by kind treatment, the inhumanity of the magistrate.'<sup>49</sup>

It was argued that the workhouse committee members allowed planters to retain much of their former power first of all by denying female inmates full legal protection against abuse. They not only prevented S.M.s (who were appointed for the protection of the apprentices) from having an effective share in the control of the institution but also refused to respond to requests from the governor to amend the rules.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, they adopted a comprehensive set of rules that subjected female inmates to a disciplinary regime that far exceeded that of the estates during the period of slavery. The *Edinburgh Review* stated this most clearly in its analysis of the report of the 1836 Select Committee:

Under that name [the workhouse regulations] lie cart-whips, chains, collars, and solitary cells, to which all prisoners, male and female, apprenticed and free, are alike exposed.<sup>51</sup>

More concerned, however, were the abolitionists about the rules adopted by the workhouse committees that offered 'gratuitous oppression'; that is, punishments in addition to the S.M.s sentence and which served no purpose other than to humiliate the women, such as the cutting off of hair upon entering the workhouse.<sup>52</sup> Workhouse committee members justified the latter by arguing that it was for reasons of health and cleanliness. As this was not done on the estates during slavery when planters had a greater interest in the health of their labourers, Sligo concluded that the practice was 'a

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<sup>49</sup> Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 226.

<sup>50</sup> For a strong denunciation of denying S.M.s the right to share in the workhouse discipline, see the statement of Oldrey in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 169.

<sup>51</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, January 1838, 519.

contrivance to make up for the other annoyances, which, owing to the Abolition Law, it is no longer in their power to inflict on their apprentices.<sup>53</sup>

Abolitionists questioned the supposed civilisation of the planter-friendly S.M.s and the workhouse committee members in the same way as that of the master and his white employees during the period of slavery. Firstly, they presented them as sadists, lacking any sense of compassion for the women. The pamphlet *A Statement of Facts* mentioned that a S.M. had sent Sarah Murdoch to the workhouse, knowing her to be seven months pregnant and very ill. To emphasise the S.M.'s deviation from the metropolitan ideal of manhood, the author mentioned the effects of his decision. Four days after she was submitted to the workhouse, Sarah had given birth to a dead child, who she had buried in the workhouse yard against the specific orders of the supervisor.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, they demonstrated that they failed to elevate women. S.M.s sent extremely helpless women to the workhouse, while workhouse committee members adopted rules that treated female inmates indiscriminately. Sturge and Harvey mentioned, for instance, that pregnant and nursing women endured the same punishments as the other female inmates and in 'their full proportion'.<sup>55</sup> Finally, they compared them to men in the metropolitan society. A speaker at the public meeting in November 1837 that led to the establishment of a committee to direct the campaign for the abolition of the Apprenticeship System mentioned, for instance, that 'no man in this country is brutal enough to place any female upon the treadmill (cheers), it is a punishment reserved for ruffians of the male sex.'<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Contrary to solitary confinement and the whip, these were not punishments for disobeying the workhouse rules.

<sup>53</sup> [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 23. The 1836 Select Committee denounced chaining on similar grounds, see *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 7 and 221.

<sup>54</sup> *Statement of Facts*, 12.

<sup>55</sup> Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 336.

<sup>56</sup> *A Report of the Proceedings of the Public Meeting Held at Exeter Hall on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 1837* (London, 1837), 26. The meeting was held on 2 November in Exeter and led to the

Abolitionists remained thus convinced that the physical abuse of women not only debased the victim but all involved. Or, in the words of Lord Glenelg it was 'intimately connected with the moral elevation of both sexes.'<sup>57</sup> The broadest area of concern among the abolitionists, however, lay not with the moral effects of the practices but with the ways in which they enabled the planting class to retain much of their former power.

### *Illegal Practices*

Flogging, chaining and the cutting off of hair were all regarded as illegal practices. Abolitionists concentrated on the illegality of flogging as the Abolition Act specifically forbade for 'any court, judge or justice to punish any female apprentice by whipping or beating her person', but made no direct references to the other practices.<sup>58</sup> This focus allowed them, in other words, to demonstrate that planters grossly violated their contract with parliament. The M.P. Daniel O'Connell informed a large gathering in November 1837 that the planting class had succeeded in circumventing clause XVII, which had promised the elevation of female apprentices:

True females are not ordered to be flogged, they are sent to the treadmill but there is a man who flogs them there if they do not dance, as they call it, according to his pleasure.<sup>59</sup>

Central Negro Emancipation Committee. For information on its activities and relations with the Colonial Office, see Burn, *Emancipation*, 344-46.

<sup>57</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 66. See also [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 30

<sup>58</sup> Clause XVII in the 1833 Abolition Act as reprinted in *PP* 1833, vol. IV. Chaining and the cutting off of hair were mentioned in the 1834 Jamaica Gaol Act.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Bevan, *Operation*, 39. O'Connell had voted against the Abolition of Slavery Bill in May 1833 because he disapproved of the compensation proviso and considered the apprentices' rights to be too limited. See Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 457. For similar statements, see Madden, Oldrey and Russell in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 88, 169, and 314; Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies*, 336; and Hinton, *Memoir*, 229.



While most abolitionists regarded female flogging as a 'breach of the letter of the Abolition Act', the abolitionist lawyer John Jeremie argued that it was only a 'breach of the spirit of the Abolition Act.' He mentioned that clause XVII contained the proviso: 'Excepting any law or police regulation in force against all other persons of free condition'. Rule XX of the rules made under the Jamaica Gaol Act of 4 July 1834, which gave 'any ordinary justice' the power to correct inmates by 'corporal punishment' and allowed him to delegate such power to the supervisor, mill overseer and drivers, covered, in his opinion, just such an exception.<sup>60</sup>

Abolitionists argued that planters violated the letter and spirit of the Abolition Act not only in their capacity as Assembly members but also as members of the island's judiciary.<sup>61</sup> The women were, in their opinion, only partially protected against abuse in the workhouse as well as against other violations of their recently acquired rights because the Apprenticeship System had not been accompanied by a change in the judiciary. It continued to consist of amateur justices who exercised their duties very much in the same way as before: that is, they obstructed the course of justice and dismissed incriminating evidence against members of the local elite.<sup>62</sup> Henry Sterne demonstrated this most clearly in his account of the jury investigating the death of Anna Maria Thompson. When the trial started there were only eleven jurors and in spite of the visible markings of flogging on the woman's body and a statement of a witness that female inmates in St. George workhouse were regularly flogged, the jury decided that Anna Maria Thompson had died of 'an inflammation of the bowels.'<sup>63</sup> To demonstrate the jurors' lack of civilisation and construct himself as a proper man, that

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<sup>60</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 46. For more information on the ways in which clause XVII was interpreted, see Burn, *Emancipation*, 284-86.

<sup>61</sup> The suggestion mentioned in clause XVI of the Abolition Act to adopt regulations for the 'prevention and punishment of cruelty, injustice or other wrongs or injury by the employer' was not taken up by the Jamaican legislative. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 402.

<sup>62</sup> On the continuity of the legal system, see *Edinburgh Review*, January 1838, 519.

is a man who considered the law as the supreme rule in civil conduct, Sterne mentioned that he had asked for a twelfth juror as it was 'against the Abolition Act' and that he had refused to sign the verdict.<sup>64</sup>

A more elaborate account of the ways in which the judiciary failed to protect female apprentices against physical abuse in the workhouses can be found in Sligo's *Jamaica under the Apprenticeship*. He echoed the argument of earlier abolitionists that perpetrators were acquitted because of biased juries and the problem of (black) evidence. He argued that it was partly because of the obstacles that planters put in the way of their apprentices to launch a complaint against a workhouse officer or to provide incriminating evidence against them, that so few cases of female abuse proceeded to trial. They, for instance, refused to give apprentices permission to leave the estate to give an affidavit.<sup>65</sup> Partiality of the juries explained in his opinion not only the high number of acquittals but also the fact that most of those found guilty were lower-rank workhouse officers. He illustrated this argument by mentioning that driver Phillips of St. Andrew workhouse had been found guilty of flogging a woman for not submitting to his sexual wishes, while his supervisor who had known about the incident had been kept in office. This was due to the fact that the president of the workhouse committee, Judge Mais, had not only led the trial against Phillips but had also persuaded the parish to pay the expenses of the supervisor's prosecution.<sup>66</sup> To show that the local elite was as, if not more, corrupted by power as the men who disciplined female apprentices in the workhouses, Sligo concentrated as had the earlier abolitionists on the workings of the Grand Juries. He mentioned various cases in which Grand Juries had thrown out bills and even included in a separate appendix

<sup>63</sup> Sterne, *Statement of Facts*, 247-51.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>65</sup> [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 31.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

the notes relating to the unfound bill filed against Whiteman, a workhouse overseer accused of having ordered the flogging of Jane Rentford on the mill and also of having flogged and kicked her himself.<sup>67</sup> To demonstrate the threat that the Grand Juries presented to the abolitionist project of a free Jamaica, he mentioned that some solicitors refrained from trying to secure the proper punishment of a workhouse officer by means of an indictment before the Assizes or Quarter Sessions. Mr. Anderson, for instance, prepared bills relating to the flogging of two female inmates of the Kingston workhouse but refrained from sending them in when he learned that a case supported by similar evidence had been ignored by a Grand Jury.<sup>68</sup>

To protect female apprentices against abuse in the workhouses, abolitionists suggested three methods, each of which resembled those put forward to ban female flogging during slavery. Initially, they suggested that the Colonial Office should encourage the House of Assembly to abolish rule XX of the Gaol Act to ensure that female flogging was completely forbidden.<sup>69</sup> They soon realised, however, the futility of such a course of action and proposed that the government at home issue acts that declared flogging, chaining and the cutting off of hair illegal.<sup>70</sup> Sligo concluded, for instance, in January 1838 that only an imperial act declaring 'that no local law or regulations can interfere with the Abolition Act; and that the flogging of a female, no matter in what place, or under what circumstances, is a high misdemeanour' could bring the abuse of female inmates to an end.<sup>71</sup> The Colonial Office supported such demands. It was the driving force behind the Abolition of Slavery Amendment Bill,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., cxxii-cvxxiii. The bill was rejected on the grounds that four of the six affidavits denied the principal charge.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, *Statements and Observations*, 32; and *Edinburgh Review*, January 1838, 519.

<sup>70</sup> *Statement of Facts* expressed this most clearly: 'It is utterly hopeless to depend . . . on the integrity and good faith of the Jamaica House of Assembly . . . not one atom of power will they ever, by their own acts and deed, be induced to surrender'. 42-43.

<sup>71</sup> [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 29.

passed in March 1838, which tried to remedy a variety of abuses associated with the Apprenticeship System. It included among others a ban on the 'punishment of female apprentices by beating, placing on the treadmill or in penal gang.'<sup>72</sup> By December 1837, however, most abolitionists were convinced that such imperial legislation did much to protect female apprentices but left intact many (workhouse) practices that prevented the elevation of women as promised in the Abolition Act and hence proposed immediate abolition of the Apprenticeship System.<sup>73</sup>

As it was not only the deficiency of the law that left apprenticed women partially unprotected against abuse, some abolitionists argued that also a drastic reform of the judiciary and the organisation of the workhouses was needed. Sligo concluded his examination of the island's workhouses with the remark that there 'cannot be any doubt as to the necessity of a change in the judicial system, as well as a strict examination into the condition of all those places of confinement.' This was not only needed, in his opinion, to provide the women with the protection they were by law entitled to, but also to ensure that with full freedom, there would be 'more watchfulness, than at present' to protect the rights of the black Jamaican population.<sup>74</sup> The Abolition of Slavery Amendment Bill incorporated the second suggestion. It allowed S.M.s to enter and examine all the workhouses and gave the governor the power to make regulations for the institutions.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 344. For the other provisions in the act, see *ibid.*, 355.

<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, *Speech of George Thompson at a Great Meeting for the Extinction of Negro Apprenticeship* (London, 1838), 43. This was a direct response to the Colonial Office's proposal to reform the organisational structure of the workhouses.

<sup>74</sup> [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 30. A similar concern is expressed in *Statement of Facts*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 355.

### 'I Did Not See Any Cruelty Practised'<sup>76</sup>

The colonialist debate is also characterised by continuity and discontinuity. An important discontinuity is the absence of the voice of the absentee planter and other members of the West India Committee in England. Most of them valued the Apprenticeship System, especially the monetary compensation and the length of the transition period. Their inactivity in this period stemmed, furthermore, from the fact that they had observed first-hand the force of British abolitionism and thus realised the futility of resistance against the System.<sup>77</sup>

Jamaican planters regarded the workhouse as a means to retain their former power. The disciplinary regime that the female inmates were subjected to served them in other ways as well. The Apprenticeship System decreased output levels by 15 per cent mainly because apprentices were only allowed to work 40 1/2 hours per week.<sup>78</sup> Output levels prior to 1834 had relied primarily upon the use and threat of external coercion. As this method was no longer available to the planters, they needed other means to ensure that their labourers would work as hard as before and thus guarantee a reasonable level of output. The majority hoped that time and labour in the workhouse would make their employees docile and hard working. Planter John Wallace suggested most clearly in his statement before the Daughtrey and Gordon Commission that planters regarded the workhouse as an excellent deterrent:

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<sup>76</sup> Israel Lemon, president of the workhouse committee of St. Ann, in *PP* 1837-38, XLIX, 193.

<sup>77</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 384-85; and Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, 131-32. By 1835 the West India Committee was moribund. It did little to defend the case of the planting class, apart from sending witnesses to the Select Committee.

<sup>78</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 272 and 367.

I told her [his apprentice Mary James] that I would endeavour to obtain her release [from the workhouse], if she would promise to behave better in the future; she made the promise and then I went to Mr. Drake the supervisor.<sup>79</sup>

Though not articulated as such, planters must also have regarded the workhouse as a means to teach their labourers attributes that were needed to transform Jamaica into a capitalist economy, such as regularity and industry, and hence ensure that their enterprises would remain operative with full freedom.<sup>80</sup> Some planters also valued the workhouse as a source of cheap labour. By hiring a penal gang to cut cane or mend fences, they were able to prevent (at a relatively low cost) a decline in their output levels.<sup>81</sup>

Considering these three benefits it is not surprising that planters actively tried to combat attempts by S.M.s, the governor and the Colonial Office to modify or end the disciplinary strategies faced by female inmates. Their defence was extremely strong with regard to flogging, as this practice was most closely associated with their former status. Before analysing their struggle to retain the right to flog female inmates, it is necessary to provide an overview of the arguments put forward by the planters and their supporters in the workhouse committees, the House of Assembly and the judiciary to deny accusations that the mill, flogging, chaining and the cutting off of hair were immoral and illegal practices.

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<sup>79</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 180.

<sup>80</sup> A dominant argument in the metropolitan discussion about penal reform was that punishments should teach the prisoners skills required of factory labourers. See J. Briggs, C. Harrison, A. McInnes and D. Vincent, *Crime and Punishment in England: An Introductory History* (London: University College Press, 1996), 10

*Legal, Decent, Mild and Salutory Practices*

The arguments presented in response to questions asked by the S.Ms, the 1836 Select Committee, the governor and the Secretary of State show considerable continuity with those presented by resident colonialists during slavery.<sup>82</sup> They relied, for instance, also heavily upon the idea that the women were inherent troublemakers. William Miller, a former property manager, told the Select Committee that chaining was not an additional punishment but a means to deal with rebellious female inmates: 'They are frequently employed on the roads, there is only one or two people to look after them; it is to prevent escape.'<sup>83</sup> The image of the inherent troublemaker featured most prominently in the defence of female flogging. John Nethersole, a member of the Kingston workhouse committee, explained that the committee had adopted the rule to flog women because many had thrown themselves off the treadmill 'under the impression that they could not be flogged.'<sup>84</sup> The Assembly committee that investigated several instances of female flogging in this workhouse in June 1836 argued along similar lines. For instance, it justified the flogging of Janet Williams by mentioning that she had been extremely violent and obstinate.<sup>85</sup> Both Nethersole and the committee suggested, thus, that the floggings facilitated rather than obstructed the aim of the Apprenticeship System. They ensured that the women carried out their sentence and as such taught them to be law-abiding citizens.

Other disciplinary practices were at times also justified by the argument that they served the women's interests. The cutting off of hair was generally presented as

<sup>81</sup> The average hire of an inmate was 1s. and 3d. a day. See the rules of the fifteen workhouses in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 511.

<sup>82</sup> Resident colonialists did not publish on the workings of the Apprenticeship System.

<sup>83</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 221.

<sup>84</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 65.

<sup>85</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 394.

benefiting the women's health. A similar argument was used with regard to the practice adopted by some workhouses to strap the women to the treadmill. According to Robert Cadenhead, the deputy supervisor of the Falmouth workhouse, the women 'would bruise their legs severely' if not strapped on.<sup>86</sup> And the supervisor of St. Ann's, Alexander Levi, suggested that chaining within the walls of the institution was a means to ensure the women's safety as the workhouse was very 'insecure at night.'<sup>87</sup>

Colonialists used three other strategies to deny the abolitionist accusation that the disciplinary practices affected the moral development of all involved. First of all, they dismissed the abolitionist contention that female inmates were abused on a large scale as a sheer myth. William Burge, the agent for Jamaica in London, argued in March 1836 that governor Sligo was wrong in assuming that the cutting off of hair was practised on a large scale in the island. According to him only one case of such abuse had taken place which had been 'entirely in error.'<sup>88</sup> Secondly, they shifted the blame for instances of abuse from themselves to individual workhouse officers and even S.M.s. For instance, V.L.M. Richard Heming blamed the injuries that the female inmates of St. Ann workhouse sustained on the mill on supervisor Drake. He regularly changed the weights in order to 'favour those towards whom he is friendly disposed, or injure those against whom he entertains any ill-will.'<sup>89</sup>

These two strategies were far less often resorted to than the 'old' strategy of presenting the punishments as moderate. Several witnesses before the Select Committee argued that chaining was far from a torturing experience as the chains

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<sup>86</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 335.

<sup>87</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 193. It is likely that Levi referred here to the drivers' attempts to persuade the women to have sex with them.

<sup>88</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 42. Burge referred here to the case of Mary Hennessy. As she was ordered to be confined in the workhouse rather than punished, her hair should not have been shaven off. See also the dismissal of Sligo's accusation that female flogging was a widespread practice in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 218 and 280; and *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 332.

<sup>89</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 198. Supervisors usually blamed instances of abuse on their assistants. See, for instance, George Deverell's statement in *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 420.



were of a 'very light' description.<sup>90</sup> Colonialists were most concerned, however, to deny charges that the mill and flogging were torturing experiences. It was generally argued that the mill was so carefully constructed that the women seldom suffered major injuries. Supervisor Liddel of St. Andrew workhouse mentioned that it had a regulator, which ensured that it could only go to a certain degree of speed.<sup>91</sup> Any instances of injury were not blamed on the mill operators but on the women themselves. Robert Cadenhead mentioned that the women only got injured if 'they attempted to jump off' in order to avoid their sentence.<sup>92</sup> The claim that the floggings were severe was primarily denied by stating that the women received only a few lashes. The supervisor of the Kingston workhouse, George Aitchison, told an Assembly committee that he had ordered the driver to give Janet Williams 'only two or three stripes over her clothes.'<sup>93</sup> Some colonialists also denied the severity argument by describing the state of the women's bodies after the infliction of the punishment. V.L.M. John Kelly informed a committee investigating the flogging of Jane Reid in the Falmouth workhouse that he had seen only a 'few marks on her back' that did not look very 'severe.'<sup>94</sup>

The planters and their supporters tried also very hard to deny the accusation that they were 'men of hardened and brutal character.'<sup>95</sup> Before 1834, resident colonialists did this primarily by comparing themselves with men in the metropolitan society. In this period, they adopted the strategy of the 'enlightened' colonialists: comparing themselves with other white men in the island. Members of the workhouse committees and also some supervisors constructed themselves as 'men of feeling' by

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<sup>90</sup> See the statements of Oldham and Miller in *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 221 and 281.

<sup>91</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 331.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. This is one of the few responses to the abolitionist accusation that the mill affected the women's sexual purity by exposing parts of their body.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

denouncing the behaviour of certain workhouse officers. V.L.M. Richard Heming, as we have seen, gave a very unfavourable account of supervisor Drake of St. Ann workhouse. Drake's successor, Alexander Levi, provided in turn a negative picture of the mill overseer: 'He is a man of the most violent character, addicted to liquor and was very partial in the execution of his duty.'<sup>96</sup> They also presented themselves as civilised men by mentioning the action they had undertaken to ameliorate the condition of female inmates. Supervisor George Deverell of the Mandeville workhouse mentioned that he had refused to give his assistants orders to flog the women on the mill.<sup>97</sup> They especially emphasised their treatment of pregnant and nursing women. Israel Lemon, the president of the workhouse committee of St. Ann, mentioned that he had forbidden the supervisor to put pregnant and nursing women on the mill, while Alexander Levi stated that he had not only followed this order but had also ensured that nursing women were given lighter work and were exempted from chaining.<sup>98</sup> The latter lent further support to his claim that he had done everything possible to elevate female inmates by mentioning that he had taken measures to safeguard their chastity. He had ordered the drivers to hand in their keys to the women's department in order to prevent sexual abuse and he had stipulated that female and male inmates were to bathe in different rivers.<sup>99</sup>

The above-mentioned strategies were generally used in combination with the argument that the disciplinary practices were not contrary to law and that the women were fully protected against abuse. It was argued that chaining and the cutting off of hair were legal practices because they were mentioned in the rules and regulations of the workhouses which were in accordance with the 1834 Gaol Act. For instance,

<sup>95</sup> Henry Taylor, a senior clerk in the Colonial Office, cited in Burn, *Emancipation*, 281.

<sup>96</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 132-33.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 198; and *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 420.

<sup>98</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 193.

supervisor Patrick Thomas of St. John workhouse denied S.M. Baynes' accusation that he had 'illegally' put collars and chains on several female inmates by stating that he had acted 'in pursuance with the rules and regulations of the institution.'<sup>100</sup> The arguments used to demonstrate that flogging was in accordance with the letter of the Abolition Act will be examined below.

Colonialists responded in various ways to the abolitionist contention that biased juries left women only partially protected against abuse. Their most common argument was that the judiciary dealt mercilessly with officers who had violated the workhouse rules regarding the infliction of corporal punishment. The Assembly committee emphasised that driver John Gordon and supervisor Sloly from the Falmouth workhouse had been found guilty of flogging female inmates in the penal gang and on the mill without having the authority to inflict corporal punishment.<sup>101</sup> They also tried to show that the Grand Juries' verdicts depended on thorough and unbiased research. The president of the Grand Jury investigating a bill against several officers of the Kingston workhouse, Mr. Hyslop, informed an Assembly committee that

a more anxious, patient and deliberate investigation was never bestowed by 23 gentlemen. The grand jury were occupied in the inquiry the greater part of two consecutive days; we even applied to the Court for further evidence, and the mayor of Kingston was sworn and sent before us.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>100</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 132. Similar arguments were used for the cutting off of hair, see *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 64 ; and *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 47-49.

<sup>101</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 394. The latter was not punished as it was argued that he had acted under the orders of a S.M. The workhouse rules of this institution mentioned that only V.L.M.s had the right to order corporal punishment.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 396. The jury investigated the flogging of Janet Williams who was flogged for refusing to work the mill. It dismissed the case on the grounds that the workhouse rules allowed for female flogging.

*The Battle over the Whip*

S.M.s were the first obstacle that the planters faced in their struggle to retain the right to flog female inmates. In July 1835, S.M.s were given the right to enter and inspect the workhouses as well as the right to ask the governor to investigate instances of noticed abuse.<sup>103</sup> Several S.M.s reported instances of illegal flogging, that is flogging not specified in the workhouse rules, and were subsequently ordered by the governor to investigate the matter.<sup>104</sup> Workhouse officers were generally very reluctant to co-operate with such investigations as they often led to prosecutions.<sup>105</sup> S.M. Moresby, investigating instances of female flogging and other abuse in the Kingston workhouse, complained to governor Sligo that the supervisor had in the 'most peremptory and insolent manner' refused to allow him to interview the head driver.<sup>106</sup> Evidence suggests that some S.M.s exceeded their authority by ordering the officers to exempt the female inmates that they had committed from flogging. Workhouse committees far from appreciated such interference in the management of the workhouse and told the officers to ignore such orders. Sometimes they went even further and asked the governor to penalise the S.M. The workhouse committee of St. John, for instance, asked governor Sligo to dismiss S.M. Baynes for having given the supervisor specific orders with regard to the women sentenced by him.<sup>107</sup>

The governor and the Secretary of the State formed the second obstacle in the struggle. Although Sligo and his successor Lionel Smith had different ideas about the

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<sup>103</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 279-80.

<sup>104</sup> Sligo's letter to the Assembly in June 1836 in which he mentioned 24 cases of illegal flogging was primarily based on the reports of such investigations. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 394.

<sup>105</sup> The one carried out by S.M. Bourne in March 1836, for instance, led to three bills of indictment. See *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 34; and *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 402 and 414.

<sup>106</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 417. As this had taken place in front of the mill, he was of the opinion that it had undermined his influence over the apprentices.

<sup>107</sup> *PP* 1837, vol. LIII, 128.

best way to manage the workhouse, both men agreed with the Secretary of State, Lord Glenelg, that the flogging of female inmates was an illegal and inhuman practice.<sup>108</sup> Their campaign to end the practice took place between April 1835 and April 1838 and consisted of three steps. First, they asked workhouse committees to abolish the rule that allowed female flogging. When this failed to have an impact, they asked the House of Assembly to pass an act that would undo the ambiguity of clause XVII. Finally, they asked the government at home to abolish the practice by amending the Abolition Act.<sup>109</sup>

In April 1835, Sligo asked the Kingston workhouse committee why Janet Williams and Aglaia Ceffay had been flogged. The committee replied that they had 'considered themselves justified by the clause in the Gaol Act, in passing a rule that females should be flogged.'<sup>110</sup> In July, the governor sent a circular to the workhouse committees informing them that 'all corporal punishment was illegal without the order of a superior court.' A month later, he was informed about the death of Anna Maria Thompson. This and two similar cases made him realise that a direct appeal to the workhouse committees was insufficient to combat the practice.<sup>111</sup> He therefore wrote a letter to the House of Assembly in November 1835 saying:

A much more serious breach, not only of the spirit but even in the letter of the law, has been committed under the supposed authority of the Act in question. His Excellency alludes to the rule permitting the use of the whip upon women by the superintendents of treadmills. This is a direct infringement of the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Sligo wished to end the abuse in the workhouse by putting the institutions under control of the S.M.s. Smith, who arrived in the island in August 1836, was content to leave the workhouses in the hands of local magistrates on the condition that the discretionary power exercised by the supervisors was withdrawn. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 287.

<sup>109</sup> At the same time the governor ordered the prosecution of workhouse officers. This campaign demonstrates most clearly that after August 1834 the Assembly faced a much stronger opposition from the governor than the Colonial Office. Of the two governors, Smith was the most conciliatory towards the Assembly.

<sup>110</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 62; and [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 28.

<sup>111</sup> Burn, *Emancipation*, 285.

section of the Abolition Act, which expressly forbids the whipping of the women under any circumstances.<sup>112</sup>

The Assembly did not respond to his letter. In February 1836, Sligo addressed them again on the issue, this time in a direct speech in which he severely criticised their unwillingness to combat the practice: 'So far from passing an Act to prevent the recurrence of such cruelty, you have in no way responded your disapprobation of it; you have not even denied the truth of my assertion, and therefore must have credited it, notwithstanding you have taken no steps to put an end to it.'<sup>113</sup>

The Assembly used various strategies to deny Sligo's claim that female flogging was practised on a large scale. First, they pointed out that the practice did not prevail by stating that they were aware of only two cases: that of Eliza Carr by the supervisor of the Kingston workhouse and that of Jane Reid in the Falmouth workhouse. Second, they argued that these 'solitary cases of error' were 'illegal' as the workhouse officers had violated the rules of the institution. Eliza Carr's flogging, for instance, was 'illegal' because the rules of the institution stated that 'no corporal punishment is to be inflicted unless ordered by a special or visiting justice, and only by the latter when every other mode of punishment has been tried and failed.'<sup>114</sup> Third, they argued along the lines of the Kingston workhouse committee that although these cases were 'illegal', female flogging as such was in accordance with the law, that is the 1834 Gaol Act. Finally, they rejected Sligo's suggestion to pass an Act to undo female flogging. They not only assumed that it was beyond their 'duty and power' to pass such an Act but also that the 1834 Gaol Act was 'quite abundant' to prevent future instances of female flogging. Another argument used to reject Sligo's proposal

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<sup>112</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 177. The Jamaica Abolition Act forbade female flogging in clause XXI.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 173. Sligo and also Glenelg wished the Assembly to pass an act, which stipulated that apprentices remained under the protection of the Abolition Act when they entered the workhouse.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

was that those committed of such 'solitary cases of error' were subject to severe penalties. They mentioned, for example, that the supervisor who had ordered Jane Reid's flogging had been dismissed for his offence.<sup>115</sup>

In June 1836 Sligo sent another letter to the Assembly in which he listed 24 cases of female flogging that had taken place since August 1834. The House conducted a quick inquiry into four cases. Similar strategies were used as in February to 'refute the calumny contemplated by them.' They were also presented as 'solitary cases of error.' They were now, however, not only attributed to workhouse officers but also to S.M.s. The report concluded that in some cases 'blame must rest solely with those officers of the Crown whose peculiar duty it is to see that the laws are carried into effect.'<sup>116</sup> The fact that some workhouse officers were fined or even indicted and found guilty was used to support the claim that the law was 'amply sufficient' and thus in no need of change.<sup>117</sup>

The report of the Daughtrey and Gordon Commission was finished in October 1837 and convinced the Secretary of State that more drastic action was needed to protect female inmates against flogging. In February 1838, he asked the Assembly to pass an Act that would put the workhouses under the control of the governor and the S.M.s. He told them that if they refused to do so, he would ask parliament to interfere.<sup>118</sup> As the Assembly remained as unwilling as before to surrender the hold of the planting class on the workhouses, Parliament issued the Abolition of Slavery Amendment Bill.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 174-75.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 395; and *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 414.

<sup>118</sup> *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 272.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. Even after the abolition of the Apprenticeship, the Assembly refused to follow the government's directives regarding the control of the island's penal institutions. In October 1838, parliament issued an act which empowered the Privy Council or the Governor in Council to make regulation for all the prisons and workhouses in the colonies. The Assembly voted this act a violation of their rights. The governor thereupon dissolved the Assembly. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 361.

Similar battles were fought over the cutting off of hair and chaining.<sup>120</sup> They also demonstrate that the Assembly was the best means of the planters to uphold the disciplinary practices that benefited them in various ways. The Assembly refused to undertake action against them as it considered them legal, that is in accordance with the 1834 Gaol Act. Allegations of female physical abuse were swept aside by blaming individual officers and officers of the Crown. Workhouse committees and the judiciary formed the planters' second line of defence. The former confirmed the Assembly's standpoint by refusing to change their rules. The latter ensured that officers accused of abusing female inmates were acquitted and that there was thus no deterrent for officers to carry out specific wishes of local planters or otherwise transgress the workhouse rules.

### Conclusions

From the 1780s an active campaign was carried out in the metropolitan society to transform existing prisons into institutions that both deterred and reformed the convicts. Quakers played a leading role in the campaign. They set up the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline, which advocated a strict regulation of time, space and diet. The treadmill was in their opinion an excellent means to achieve the dual goal of suffering and reform. It taught the prisoners regularity but also punished them as it deprived them of all independence in regulating their own labour. Their campaign had success as by 1824 some 54 prisons had adopted the treadmill.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> The former began in November 1835 and the latter in June 1836.

<sup>121</sup> R. McGowen, 'The Well-Ordered Prison: England, 1780-1865', in N. Morris and D. J. Rotman, eds., *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practices of Punishment in Western Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 85-97.



Critics of the prison reform campaign argued that the reformers focussed not enough on deterrence. They aimed to turn the prison into an antidote to freedom. The public debate over the prison heightened in the early 1830s when the number of prisoners rose sharply. Reformers saw this increase as a result of the lack of prison discipline. They advocated two prison systems to remedy this situation: the silent and the separate system. Under the former, prisoners worked together but in a silence reinforced by punishments for those who violated the rule. The latter implied that prisoners spent long hours in their own cells to commune with their own conscience.<sup>122</sup> This was the system favoured by the committee of the House of Lords that investigated the prison system in England and Wales in 1835. The legislation that followed its report established an inspectorate which could publicise prison abuses but not order changes, and forced prison managers to report changes in the institution's rules to the Home Secretary.<sup>123</sup>

The penal practices surrounding the debate examined in this chapter engaged with the metropolitan campaign for prison reform. Shortly after the publication of the report of the House of Lords' committee, the Colonial Office ordered governor Sligo to carry out an inquiry into the condition of the island's gaols and workhouses. It also instructed the governor to ask the Assembly to consider the adoption of some of the recommendations in the report.<sup>124</sup> The adoption of the treadmill in the workhouses, the change in the Abolition Act in 1835 which allowed S.M.s to inspect the institutions, and the provisions in the Abolition of Slavery Amendment Bill with

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 97-100.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 100-01; and M. Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 177.

<sup>124</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XV, 506. The inquiry, consisting of a written questionnaire, was carried out between December 1835 and February 1836 and was accepted by the government. The 1836 Select Committee and bad reports from the island, however, raised so many questions about the discipline in the institutions that Captain Pringle was appointed in September 1837 to investigate the condition in the gaols and workhouses. See Burn, *Emancipation*, 288.

regard to the punishment of female apprentices and the management of the workhouses should equally be seen within the light of the campaign and its outcomes.<sup>125</sup>

The debate itself was also linked to the metropolitan campaign. The terms used by the abolitionists to describe the workhouse officers and workhouse committee members mirrored those used by the prison reformers to refer to the men in charge of English prisons. They also accused them of not being impersonal, impartial and professional.<sup>126</sup> Their suggestions to counteract the debasing effects of female punishments, such as the provision of proper uniforms and the employment of matrons, also reflect the influence of the campaign. Colonialists borrowed elements from the campaign to defend the mill as a 'salutory' mode of female punishment and female flogging as a means to enforce internal discipline. The Kingston workhouse committee, for instance, told the governor in March 1835 that 'the cat should be resorted to and made use of to all persons indiscriminately' in order to keep up 'the discipline of the institution'.<sup>127</sup>

Although abolitionists preferred time and labour in the workhouse to public and indecent floggings, they were extremely outraged about this new mode of female punishment. Their outrage stemmed first of all from the fact that the women were punished as criminals rather than apprentices. Upon entering the workhouse they no longer fell under the Abolition Act but the 1834 Gaol Act and hence were devoid of protection of their new status.<sup>128</sup> Abolitionists were of the opinion that the women had

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<sup>125</sup> The inquiry into the workhouses and the Bill demonstrate most clearly the government's gradual move to infringe upon the privileges of the Assembly and also show that the debate about the Apprenticeship System raised fundamental questions about imperial governance.

<sup>126</sup> The influence of the campaign on the abolitionist debate is not surprising considering the fact that many abolitionists were also actively involved in it. Joseph Sturge, for instance, visited American penal institutions in order to devise an appropriate discipline system for British prisons. For the reformers' accusations of prison officers, see McGowen, 'The well-Ordered Prison', 82.

<sup>127</sup> *PP* 1836, vol. XLVIII, 65.

<sup>128</sup> This is most clearly expressed in [Sligo], *Jamaica*, 24.

not committed crimes but minor offences that were primarily caused by their maternal duties. Joseph Sturge, for instance, told a Birmingham audience:

If the mother, driven to distraction by the neglect of her children, and anxiety for their safety, should taunt her inhuman overseer with cruelty, she is probably charged with insolence, and sent to "dance" the treadmill for seven, ten, or fourteen days, or to work in the penal gang for seven days.<sup>129</sup>

Secondly, the disciplinary practices that female inmates were subjected to were at odds with those faced by female convicts in their own society. The latter were, for instance, exempted from the mill, could not be flogged, were strictly segregated from male inmates, wore a special dress, and were supervised by a matron.<sup>130</sup> The Baptist missionary Thomas Burchell expressed the oddity of female chaining in a letter to his brother in June 1835: 'Every day our streets are paraded by men chained together; yes, and women chained together also!'<sup>131</sup> Thirdly, and linked to the foregoing, the practices did not allow the women to acquire the feminine virtues needed to become moral regenerators and hence obstructed their project.

The abolitionists relied in this debate far less upon the image of the potentially virtuous woman. They presented the apprenticed woman first and foremost as a suffering victim. She suffered physical and psychological abuse at the hands of hardened workhouse officers and was also, if not more, the victim of the island's legislators who refused to recognise her newly acquired rights. The suffering apprenticed woman differed from the suffering slave woman in that her humanity was more real, as indicated by the inclusion of her name and voice. Abolitionists hinted in

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<sup>129</sup> *Horrors*, 18.

this debate at the roles that the women were to exercise with full freedom - mother and homemaker - by concentrating upon those disciplinary practices that prevented them from acquiring the attributes essential for this role as well as the experiences of pregnant and nursing women.<sup>132</sup> Aspects of the women's workhouse experience that could make their readers doubt the women's ability to exercise this role, such as the strong bonds that they developed with male inmates, were systematically excluded from their narratives of female suffering.<sup>133</sup>

The change in the women's legal and social status did not affect the colonialist representation of them. They not only continued to regard them as inherent troublemakers but also as 'workhorses'. Time and labour in the workhouse was a means to make the women both more docile and hardworking. The workhouse practices to which they subjected the women did not recognise their femininity and even tried, as in the case of the cutting off of the women's plaits upon entering the institutions, to efface any trace of femininity. The practices also placed the women beyond the pale of humanity. Chaining was of course the ultimate denial of their humanity.<sup>134</sup>

The abuse of female apprentices in the workhouse was a vehicle through which both sides expressed their views on Jamaica's transition from a slave to a free labour economy. Abolitionists were extremely anxious to see that the Apprenticeship System instilled in the ex-slaves the attributes necessary to achieve their ideal society, such as self-discipline and a desire for self-improvement. In this discussion they were,

<sup>130</sup> Briggs, *Crime and Punishment*, 159-61; and McGowen, 'The Well-Ordered Prison', 79-110.

<sup>131</sup> Burchell, *Memoir*, 295.

<sup>132</sup> Very few abolitionists addressed, for instance, the women's labour in the penal gang.

<sup>133</sup> Such accounts could make the readers' doubt the women's ability to be dutiful wives. For information on the relationships between male and female inmates, see James Williams', *A Narrative of Events*.

<sup>134</sup> For more information on the ways in which the workhouse denied the women's humanity, individuality and femininity and the women's response to them, see my article 'Stemmen in de Stilte'.

with the exception of Sligo, not concerned about the island's move towards capitalism. They were far more anxious about the island's progress in terms of morality and civilisation. The lack of success in this respect was, according to them, due to the fact that the Apprenticeship System was carried out by existing administrative, legal and judicial systems. The workhouse committees, the judiciary and the House of Assembly continued to be dominated by planters who aimed to retain as much of their former power as possible and even tried to increase it by subjecting female inmates to humiliating practices that were absent on the estates during slavery.

The colonialists also articulated a problem of freedom in this debate. The freeing of the slaves had unsettled their superior status in the island, which they tried to undo by using the loopholes in the law and preventing attempts to withdraw their control over the workhouses. It also presented them with the problem of labour. The reduction in working hours created a short-term problem, while the freeing of all children under six forced them to think about their future labour force. There are various indications that the disciplinary regime faced by female inmates served more as an answer to the planters' identity than labour problem. Firstly, the planters did not make sufficient use of the workhouse as a means to deal with the reduction in working hours. They hired inmates to perform jobs but did not consider the use of the mill to grind their coffee, cocoa or pimento. Secondly, statements by former female inmates suggest that the women suffered so many injuries that they were not able to work for some time after their release and that a great many never succeeded in regaining their former productivity levels.<sup>135</sup> Finally, the numerous miscarriages and

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<sup>135</sup> For striking accounts of the long-lasting injuries of the mill, see the statements of Amelia Lawrence, Mary Ann Shaw, and Eleanor Howell in *PP* 1837-38, vol. XLIX, 174 and 191.

stillbirths brought about by the mill and the floggings negatively affected the future supply of labour.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Various former inmates of St. Ann workhouse suffered miscarriages. See, for instance, the statement of Susan White in *ibid.*, 177.

## CONCLUSION

Through an examination of three debates about Jamaican slave women in the period 1780-1838, this study has argued that abolitionists and colonialists used a variety of images of slave women to justify their projects, images which had both a delimiting and an enabling effect on slave women. It has confirmed the conclusion of existing studies on representations of slave women that the troublemaker and the scheming Jezebel were dominant images in colonialist texts. It has added to these studies by pointing out that these images, which constructed slave women as different, coexisted with a wide range of images that stressed their similarity with English women, such as the affectionate mother and the capable homemaker. The latter played a prominent role in the late 1820s and early 1830s as the slave regime's existence came under severe threat. They were often wrapped in the argument that slaves were better off than members of the English working class and served to avert abolitionist criticism and parliamentary intervention. Images that stressed slave women's difference featured heavily in the late eighteenth century when they were used to justify interventions in slave women's lives that served to guarantee natural increase as well as stability and productivity. They also featured prominently during the Apprenticeship period to convince the audience that the ex-slaves were not ready for full freedom. In other words, colonialists denoted the differences between slave women and white women when an actual or possible extension of the slaves' freedom threatened their privileged social position.

This study has not only added to but also modified some of the arguments presented in previous studies on colonialist images of slave women. The latter argue that the images only had a delimiting effect on slave women, that is they blocked

advancement in their status. This study has shown that while most of the images were indeed delimiting, some were also enabling. A clear example of the latter is that of the ignorant mother. This image justified interventions in slave motherhood that enabled slave women to take better care of their children. These interventions included: providing nursing women with a lighter workload; extra allowances of food; and a nurse in the field to look after their infants.

The allocation of informal rights and the various changes in the slave law that went some way towards enabling slave women to live up to the white, middle-class ideal of domesticity, served to avert abolitionist criticism. They also ensured the continuing profitability of the estates. The latter aim often led planters to criticise certain aspects of slave women's lives, such as their sexual behaviour and their practice of late weaning. We have seen that drastic solutions were put forward to change such attitudes, especially by the non-resident planters, but that they were seldom adopted. Various factors accounted for the contradictions between colonialist rhetoric and plantation practice. Prominent amongst them were concerns about stability. For instance, suggestions to combat late weaning failed to be adopted because planters thought it would lead to slave resistance, while proposals to prevent slave women from having sex with white men were not taken up because interracial sex was seen as an excellent means of control through providing divisions among the slave labour force.

This study has given various other indications that the Caribbean slave system was characterised by intractable contradictions. The wide range of measures that were adopted to increase the slave population coexisted with plantation practices that were detrimental to slave life, such as the flogging of pregnant women. And while planters expressed a deep concern about the balance of power on their estates, they



refrained from adopting measures to combat important sources of instability, such as cross-plantation mating, Nonconformist marriages, and white men's sexual abuse of slave women. There are two other ways in which this study has debunked some of the myths about slave control. First, it has demonstrated that the planters' power was a negotiated power. The extent to which planters could control their labour force depended not only on economic and contextual factors, but also on abolitionist and government pressure and slave action. Secondly, it has pointed out that planters' interventions in slaves' lives were not only determined by a desire for increased profits but also by a sheer wish to retain their superior position in the island, and that the interventions created numerous dilemmas for the planters. Before adopting an intervention, planters had to weigh its short-term costs and long-term benefits. The training of midwives, for instance, would yield them long-term economic benefits as it enhanced natural increase but would reduce short-term benefits as it generated instability.

The most novel contribution of the thesis to the developing historiography of slave women relates to abolitionist representations. The most dominant abolitionist representation was that of the suffering and innocent victim, intended to arouse the sympathy of the audience and encourage it to undertake action. This image was first of all constructed through denying slave women a voice and providing detailed accounts of the harm that they suffered at the hands of their white owners and their subordinates. It was also constructed through exclusion, that is the omission of stories of slave women's successful resistance to the plantation regime. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, abolitionists provided images that featured in colonialist discourse, such as the indifferent mother and the promiscuous slave

woman. They did not attribute slave women's difference to their nature, however, but to the system of slavery. In the 1820s and 1830s, abolitionists found it more important to denote the similarity between slave women and white women. Images such as the capable homemaker and the naturally chaste slave woman were used to convince the audience that slave women both could and would carry out their proper gender roles with full freedom and hence that abolitionist visions of a free Jamaica would succeed. These images, which became even more prominent during the Apprenticeship period, were also constructed through exclusion. Abolitionists strategically omitted in their texts aspects of slave women's lives that would undermine the audience's belief in their project. For instance, in their accounts of the women's workhouse experiences they did not detail the support that the women received from male inmates.

The abolitionist representations expressed the idea that a slave woman's place was in the home, where she was to exercise a morally uplifting influence over her husband and children and as such lay the foundations for a more moral and civilised society. This ideal identity was enabling in that it offered slave women support and protection. It was, however, also delimiting as it subjected slave women more firmly to their husbands and robbed them of their informal economic roles, such as selling surplus produce. To realise this ideal, abolitionists proposed legislation, such as a ban on female flogging and the withdrawal of women under 45 from the field. They relied, however, far more upon the Colonial Office than the government to change the condition of slave women. They often approached the former to disallow legislation proposed by the Assembly that they felt was detrimental to slave women or to put pressure on the Assembly to adopt laws that would improve their condition. The success rate of such requests increased in the mid-1820s when both senior members in the Colonial Office and colonial governors became more receptive to the abolitionist

cause. Governor Goderich, for instance, ordered investigations into several cases of extreme female physical abuse. During the Apprenticeship period, the Colonial Office and the abolitionists gradually drifted apart. The former was anxious to have the co-operation of the planters in establishing a free labour economy. He was therefore extremely reluctant to ask the Assembly to amend the 1833 Jamaica Act to remedy the abuses suffered by female apprentices as highlighted by the abolitionists. For most of the Apprenticeship period, the Colonial Office tried to improve the condition of female apprentices through the S.M.s. It gave them, for instance, instructions not to send pregnant and nursing women to the workhouse. It was only after the publication of various reports critical about the workings of the System in late 1837 that the Colonial Office began to challenge the privileges of the Assembly. By this time, however, abolitionists were firmly convinced that a call upon the Assembly or even imperial legislation was insufficient to ensure that female apprentices could exercise their newly acquired rights and duties.

The examination of abolitionist representations also makes a contribution to studies of British abolitionism. In recent years, these studies have begun to centre more on the discourse than the organisation of the movement and its middle-class roots and aims.<sup>1</sup> Some of their findings have been confirmed in this study. In particular, it has shown the lack of homogeneity among abolitionists and that their project consisted not only of the freeing of the slaves but also of a change in the mores of white men and women in slave societies. It has emphasised too that they described the slave's condition in terms of what the victim's body felt rather than what

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<sup>1</sup> One of the first studies that paid attention to abolitionist discourse was Blackburn's *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*. More recently, studies have examined particular aspects of abolitionist discourse: McGowen has looked at the abolitionists' discussion about power in his article 'Power and Humanity'; Favret has examined the abolitionist debate about flogging, especially that on the slave ships, in her article 'Flogging'; and Kitson has tried to sum up the key characteristics of the abolitionist discussion about race in the late eighteenth century in his study "'Bales of Living Anguish".

the slave thought or said. The thesis has also extended the contribution made by other recent studies. Firstly, it has demonstrated how central slave women were to the discourse of abolition. Secondly, it has more firmly shown than previous studies that the discourse of abolition underwent a major change after 1807. It moved from attempts to appease the planters to a radical attack on their mores. Finally, it has extended existing insights into the abolitionist notion of humanity. Abolitionists invoked in their debates the notion of a universal human nature. The three debates analysed in this study show most clearly that their notion of human nature was far from universal. They offered slave women a humanity that was clearly white and middle-class. The debates also indicate that this humanity was at best potential. The various images of slave women deviating from white, middle-class women expressed the idea that slaves were not yet fully human but that they could become so, if they followed abolitionist directions.

This study of slave women highlighted too the complexity of representation. It is clear, for example, that contemporaries offered multiple, changing and even contradictory images that exerted both negative and positive effects on slave women. The foregoing chapters have necessarily been more concerned with the *how* and *why* of the images than their effects, since it is extremely difficult to determine the exact link between the images and the laws and plantation practices that determined slave women's status in society. Some of the possible effects have nevertheless been noted. It has also been shown that the abolitionist and colonialist representations interacted not only with one another but also with various metropolitan discourses. Abolitionist representations of slave women were as much triggered by colonialist arguments for and against certain interventions in slave women's lives, as by eyewitness accounts

about the planters' treatment of slave women. These led colonialists to present counter representations as well as to change certain plantation practices that affected the condition of slave women. The interdependence of the discourses of slavery and abolition examined in this study, then, clearly points to the need to examine both discourses in studies on Caribbean slavery.

Abolitionists and colonialists mobilised a wide-range of metropolitan discourses in their discussion about slave women. Most prominent were those on gender and motherhood, sexuality and marriage, and punishment. These were used in three ways. Firstly, they became a standard against which both sides judged the treatment as well as behaviour of slave women. Secondly, they emerged as a source for solutions to improve the condition of slave women. And finally, they served as a standard to measure the mores of white Jamaican society.

Since their residence in Britain, abolitionists tended, unsurprisingly, to invoke these metropolitan discourses to a much larger extent than colonialists did. The latter independently invoked some discourses, notably those on motherhood, in order to safeguard the future of their economic enterprises. Most of the metropolitan discourses that they addressed, however, were the result of abolitionist pressure and government action. Non-resident colonialists resorted much more to them than resident colonialists. This was partly because of location but also because they believed that the abolitionist drive towards emancipation could be best averted by means of grand-scale amelioration. The interaction of all colonialists with these discourses can best be described as one of selective borrowing. They only addressed those elements that enabled them to avert abolitionist and governmental criticisms and come up with solutions to sustain the economic viability of slavery. Thus with regard to the discourse of marriage, they regularly mentioned stability and monogamy, but

did not, or seldom, refer to co-residence, gendered spheres of activity and full legal protection.

In aiming to show that discourses of slavery and abolition mobilised metropolitan discourses, this study makes no claim to be exhaustive. There were various other discourses with which the colonialist and abolitionist representations interacted but which have not been examined here. Future research will have to determine, for example, how discourses on the poor law and female factory labour were invoked in the debates about slave women. Future research will also have to assess in more detail the exact interactions between the abolitionist and colonialist debates and the metropolitan discourses. This study has argued that the debates reinforced these discourses. It has noted, for example, that both abolitionists and colonialists reinforced the ideal of the 'passionless woman' or the 'angel in the house', by judging slave women's sexual behaviour against the metropolitan norm of sexuality. The debates, however, also added to the metropolitan discourses. By linking promiscuity to black women, the colonialist debate about slave women's sexual behaviour added 'race' to the metropolitan discourse on sexuality. Future research will have to explore further such effects of the debates on the metropolitan discourses and will have to examine the extent to which metropolitan discourses invoked elements of the abolitionist and colonialist debates about slave women. By showing the links between the debates and the metropolitan discourses, this study has merely tried to make the reader aware of the interconnectedness of 'home', that is Britain, and the 'Empire'.

Finally, the study has illuminated the complexity of representation by showing that the categories that the abolitionists and colonialists invoked to assign difference to slave women - race, gender, sexuality and class - interacted in various and complex

ways. Race and gender, in particular, interacted in these debates. While colonialists presented all slave women as less feminine than white women, they articulated in some debates the idea that coloured slave women were more feminine than black slave women were. Race also mediated gender in complicated ways in abolitionist discourse. It articulated a belief in a common femininity, while presenting images of slave women, such as the deficient mother, that suggested that black women were less feminine than white women were. The categories of race and sexuality were far more linked in colonialist than abolitionist discourse. We have seen that colonialists presented racialised sexual identities - with black women symbolising promiscuity and white women sexual purity - that served among others to justify the sexual abuse of slave women by white men. Colonialist discourse invoked at times all three categories. Class, race and gender, for example, were interwoven in their images of slave mothers. By pointing out the intersections between race, gender, sexuality and class, this study has not, however, provided answers to questions about links between these categories of difference that structure domination and inequality. On the contrary, it has added further questions. It has asked, for instance, whether race superseded the divisions of gender, class and sexuality. Even if slave women were regarded as good mothers and wives, they were still not perceived as equal to white, middle-class women because of their skin colour.

The foregoing chapters have not only been concerned to show *how* and *why* the discourses of slavery of abolition created representations of slave women but also to demonstrate that within these discourses the slave woman functioned as a site where important political, social and cultural issues were addressed. The discourse of slavery used the slave woman to question the ability of Nonconformist missionaries to reform

the morals and manners of the slaves and to express a concern about race relations in the island, especially in the late 1820s and early 1830s. The growth of the free population, which threatened the superior status of the white minority, led some colonialists to demand measures to prevent the mixing of whites and blacks as well as other ethnic groups in the island. The discourse of abolition posed two inter-linked questions in its discussion of slave women, which were also addressed by several non-resident colonialists. What is a proper man and what makes a true, moral and civilised society? A proper man was in their opinion both a household head and a 'man of feeling'. Four prerequisites for a civilised society were mentioned, predominantly in the critical accounts of the social norms of white Jamaican society. The first was a monogamous, indissoluble, co-resident marriage in which the partners occupied distinct spheres and exercised different but complementary roles. Wives were to be subordinate to their husbands and look after the home and family, while husbands were to act as household heads and participate in the public sphere. The second was a uniform and rational law and an unbiased judiciary as a means to ensure peaceful interactions between the members of society. The third was the exercise of benevolent power. This true antithesis of the absolute power exercised by the planter and his staff protected the body, respected family life, fostered sexual morality, encouraged the instruction of the soul and had a generally morally uplifting influence on all that it came into contact with. Finally, there was the elevation of women. A true, moral and civilised society enabled women to carry out their important maternal and domestic duties.

This study has made some contributions to the developing historiography of the post-1834 era. Existing studies on the ways in which the Abolition Act affected the female



apprentices have concentrated on childcare practices.<sup>2</sup> This study has confirmed that the ways in which the planters interpreted the Abolition Act made it extremely difficult for women to take proper care of their children. It has also pointed out that on most plantations the nurse who traditionally looked after the children when the mothers were at work in the field and the full-time midwife were sent back to the field after August 1834. This study has, moreover, added much to our understanding of the conditions of female apprentices. In part II it was shown that apprenticed women faced various obstacles in carrying out their conjugal duties. These ranged from obstacles to visit their apprenticed husbands who lived on nearby estates to the planters' refusal to let their free husbands live with them. In part III it was demonstrated that, although strictly forbidden by the Abolition Act, flogging, the most important disciplinary practice that women were subjected to during slavery, was continued during the Apprenticeship period. This practice, however, was no longer exercised on the plantation but within the confines of the workhouse. Female apprentices sent to this institution were also subjected to various new forms of discipline, such as the treadmill, chaining and the cutting off of hair. This, together with the extreme deterioration in the condition of pregnant and nursing women, suggests the conclusion that the Apprenticeship System was not 'slavery by another name' but an institution worse than slavery.

This study, however, has said far more about the ways in which the Jamaican planting class tried to keep the existing power relations intact after August 1834 than about the experiences of female apprentices.<sup>3</sup> It has first of all shown that this project

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<sup>2</sup> Even the most recent studies on the experiences of female apprentices, such as Boa's 'Experiences of Women Estate Workers' has concentrated on this aspect of the women's lives.

<sup>3</sup> A fuller understanding of this project can be gained by examining the ways in which planters and their subordinates subjugated male apprentices on their estates and in the workhouses as well as by analysing the relations between S.M.s and planters in detail.

took place on two levels: the estate and the workhouse. Most planters abolished the preferential treatment of their female labourers so as to instil in them a belief that they still ruled supreme. They were also keen to see the women sent to the workhouse because the disciplinary practices in this institution ensured their subjugation through the infliction of pain and humiliation. It has demonstrated that the planters' project of sustaining their arbitrary and proprietary power was quite successful. It was not until 1837 that the imperial government began seriously to encroach upon the planters' control over female apprentices by, for example, ordering S.M.s. not to send nursing and pregnant women to the workhouse. Finally, it has indicated that the success of the planters' project partly resulted from the fact that it was supported by a number of institutions in the island which had not changed in composition after August 1834 as well as by a large contingent of planter-friendly S.M.s. The most supportive institution was the House of Assembly. The Act that it drew up in December 1833 both enabled the flogging of women in the workhouse and declared legal the planters' withdrawal of the indulgences of pregnant and nursing mothers and the allowances for children under six. In addition, the Assembly fiercely combated attempts from the government at home and local residents to diminish the planters' control over their female labour force. It not only refused to adopt a law to forbid the flogging, chaining and the cutting off of hair of female inmates in the workhouse but also fought hard to obstruct the passage of Bills that would legalise Nonconformist marriages and facilitate the co-residence of apprenticed couples.

This study leaves, of course, many questions unanswered. The authors of the texts examined were predominantly white, male and middle-class. We have seen, especially in part III, that at times they were as much concerned with constructing

their own identities as with defining those of slave women. A key and unanswered question, then, that this study raises is, what notions of Englishness, class and whiteness were articulated in these debates. Another set of questions concerns the actual representation of slave women themselves. How, for instance, did slave women respond to contemporary representations? What, furthermore, was the impact of the representations of slave women on Western culture? The latter requires an analysis of images of slave women in contemporary discourses other than those on slavery and abolition and also across a wide range of later and even present-day discourses. Diana Paton has begun to open up this avenue of research, linking the abolitionist debate about slave women with that on protective labour legislation in the early 1830s, but more could be done in this direction.<sup>4</sup> Finally, this study may provide the focus of future examinations of the meanings that have been attached to black womanhood. An understanding of the ways in which this category was produced may be improved by examining representations of black Caribbean women at significant moments in the past other than slavery, such as the post-emancipation period of 1838-1865 and the inter-war years.<sup>5</sup> As with many other studies on slavery, this thesis represents a beginning, not an end.

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<sup>4</sup> D. Paton, 'Gender, Labour, and the Body in the 1830s', an unpublished paper presented at the conference 'Representing the Body of the Slave', Nottingham, 11-13 September 2000. Visual representations of slavery have already been subjected to such a project. Marcus Wood, for instance, has traced the genealogy of Thomas Clarkson's slave ship across a range of nineteenth- and twentieth century cultural forms. See H. Altink, 'The Franco-British Conference on Slavery from the Seventeenth Century to the Nineteenth Century', *Social History* 24, 3 (1999), 311-13.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Bush has made an attempt in this direction in her article 'History, Memory, Myth', which describes the evolution of three stereotypes of black Caribbean from the seventeenth century until the present: the workhorse, the scheming Jezebel and the troublemaker.

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