

Gendering Property, Racing Capital

by Catherine Hall

The veiled slavery of the wage-workers in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world. . . . capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.

Karl Marx, *Capital* 3 vols, Moscow, 1961, vol. 1, pp. 759–60.

In his autobiography, *Interesting Times: a Twentieth Century Life*, published in 2002, Eric Hobsbawm reflected on the shifts in the historical discipline in his lifetime. Perhaps his greatest regret, he reflected, despite the development of global history, was ‘the almost total failure, largely for institutional and linguistic reasons, of history to emancipate itself from the framework of the nation-state. Looking back, this provincialism was probably the major weakness of the subject in my lifetime’.¹ Hobsbawm inspired us to think about the international and the comparative, he insisted on asking the *why* questions, convinced of the need for historians to be able to generalize and to explain, to focus on ‘the big picture’. Rooted in European cosmopolitanism and a particular version of Marxism he had scant sympathy for some of the new approaches of historians. He was critical of the cultural turn. The emphasis had moved, he argued, from analysis to description, from fact to feeling, from the macro to the micro, and he made clear how much he thought had been lost in this shifting of the gaze. Feminist history, in his view, was at best interested in ‘winning collective recognition’ rather than interpreting the world; postcolonial approaches were not on his radar beyond the work of Subaltern Studies.² As a protagonist of feminist and postcolonial work far from abandoning the *why* questions or the significance of the macro, I want to make an argument about the value of connecting these insights with older Marxist traditions particularly in relation to the debates over slavery and capitalism. The absence of grand narratives is a weakness of these new approaches in some respects but the more elaborated understandings that we are developing of the complexity of the social formations that we aim to understand offer novel and significant perspectives on the evolution and character of modern capitalism. As we struggle politically in a neo-liberal world in which the clear battle lines that once seemed to be in place no longer work, as critical historians we need new maps that fully engage with the differentiated understandings of class, of labour, of

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gender and of race and that help us to understand both the past that is not past and the present. Slavery and the plantation stand at the centre of these alternative analytical paradigms. My aim is to explore the ways in which gender and race structured the organization of slavery, were embedded in the social formation and were historically dynamic forces and axes of change in the nexus of metropole and colony.

Hobsbawm was well aware of the significance of plantation economies to the development of industrial capitalism. ‘The major achievement of the seventeenth-century crisis’, he wrote in 1954, ‘is the creation of a new form of colonialism.’³ In *Industry and Empire*, probably one of the most influential history textbooks ever written, he argued:

This book is about the history of Britain. However . . . an insular history of Britain (and there have been too many such) is quite inadequate. . . . Britain developed as an essential part of a global economy, and more particularly as the centre of that vast formal or informal ‘empire’ on which its fortunes have so largely rested.⁴

But his object of study was not the world economy or the British imperial sector, rather it was the transformation of Britain into an industrial capitalist economy. That preoccupation came from the concern of the group of Communist Party historians, in the wake of their struggle against fascism and their commitment to communism, to rewrite the history of Britain, to challenge the dominant Whig narratives of a peaceful transition from feudalism to democracy and insist on the place of class, of radicalism, revolution and conflict in the history of these islands. Hobsbawm recognized that the origins of the Industrial Revolution lay in the new centres of expansion and the commercial developments that had occurred – the rise of a market for overseas products for everyday use in Europe, ‘overseas creation of economic systems for producing such goods (e.g. slave-operated plantations) and the conquest of colonies designed to serve the economic advantage of their European owners’. Alongside this went the expansion of that ‘most inhuman traffic, the slave trade’. ‘Behind our Industrial Revolution’, he argued, ‘there lies this concentration on the colonial and “underdeveloped” markets overseas, the successful battle to deny them to anyone else’.⁵ He might have had Marx’s passage, cited as the epigraph to this essay, on his mind. But his concern, and that of his fellow Marxist historians, was not with race, slavery and the Caribbean. C. L. R James and Eric Williams did not appear in their pantheon. James and Williams, in their struggle against racism and colonialism insisted on the linkage between metropole and colony, the intimate connections between the French Revolution and San Domingue and between capitalism and slavery. It has been the task of later generations to attempt not only to put together these different traditions and trajectories but to ask new questions, not least about the place of gender in these debates.

Just as Hobsbawm's preoccupations were formed by the conjuncture in which he matured as a historian so the generations who have followed him to write 'History after Hobsbawm' have been shaped by the altered conditions in which we have lived and live, and to which we have needed and need to respond. While class was the key historical dynamic in his analytic work, gender and race have become key analytics for our 'interesting times': the times shaped by the recognition of the unfinished work of anti-colonialism, of culture as a material and symbolic force, of the reconfiguration of British society in the face of migration and globalization, of the triumph of neo-liberalism and the ever deepening inequalities that mark our contemporary world.

The initial work detailing the links between capitalism and slavery came from the Caribbean. It was the Trinidadian historian Eric Williams who in 1944 propounded the thesis that has caused such controversy over the generations. Williams never argued that slavery 'caused' the Industrial Revolution. 'It must not be inferred that the triangular trade was solely and entirely responsible for the economic development. The growth of the internal market in England played an important part in the accumulation of capital, but so too did the triangular trade.'⁶ His arguments have been attacked on varied grounds but, as Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland and I suggest in the co-authored book which documents the results of the first phase of our project on the Legacies of British Slave-Ownership (LBS), there is a move to a modified version of Williams's thesis amongst economic historians.⁷ Recent scholarship has adopted a broader conception of the slave-economy. Pomeranz sees the Atlantic slave-economy and the availability of coal as the two complementary factors allowing Britain to expand. Inikori sees Atlantic slavery together with the commercialization of agriculture as key to industrialization. His central thesis about the importance of overseas trade and within that the slave-economy has been broadly accepted by Pat Hudson and Nuala Zahediah.⁸ At the micro-level local and regional studies consistently point to the flow of slave-wealth into new institutions and industries – many concentrated in centres of commercial and financial power which were crucial to financing trade and industrialization. At the same time Williams's insight into the importance of slave-derived wealth to eighteenth-century society and culture has been greatly expanded by literary scholars in particular. Simon Gikandi, to take one example, has explored the introjections of slavery into manners, civility, sense, sensibility and the culture of taste. Slavery and the culture of taste, he argues, were both fundamental to the shaping of modern identity.⁹

Since 2009 a team of historians at University College London, of whom I am one, have been investigating slave-owners. The work of forgetting slavery – and remembering abolition – has been going on since the abolition of the slave trade. It continues unabated despite myriad efforts, most notably around the bicentenary of the abolition of the trade in 2007, to put slavery back where it belongs – as an integral part of Britain's history. Disavowal and distantiation have been crucial mechanisms facilitating avoidance and

evasion; ‘it didn’t happen here’, ‘not our responsibility’. A recent exhibition at the British Library on the Georgians, to take just one example, is silent on the source of much of the wealth critical to creating that world. To place the slave trade and slavery of the New World properly back into British and European history, peopling the silences, speaking what was unspeakable, building on what has already been done and identifying what more there is to do, requires the collective efforts of many. Research on both the enslavers and the enslaved is essential for at the heart of both metropolitan and colonial societies was the dichotomy of freedom and slavery. Our work at UCL is part of that collaborative effort. Slave-owners, their families, their properties, their plantations and merchant houses, their wealth, their homes and gardens, their writings and their politics are the lens through which we are engaging in that process.

‘The West India Interest’ were a powerful grouping in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, critical to the holding back of the abolition of the slave trade and the ending of colonial slavery in parts of the British Empire for fifty years. Yet they have never been systematically investigated despite important work on case studies of particular families. There is nothing equivalent to the body of work produced by Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese on the American South. The Genoveses’ work has been highly controversial and their account of Southern paternalism, combined, as they see it, with an anti-capitalist politics, finds few echoes in our study of British slave-owners, who were remarkable for their brutality and their commitment to emergent industrial capitalism. Our focus on British slave-ownership is a way of bringing slavery home and problematizing whiteness as an identity that carried privilege and power – demonstrating that although relatively few enslaved Africans lived in Britain, slavery was integral to the British economy, society and culture – and was understood at the time to be so. As Edward Long, the famed historian of Jamaica argued in 1774,

If, upon the whole, we revolve in our minds, what an amazing variety of trades receive their daily support, as many of them did originally their being, from the calls of the Africa and West India markets; if we reflect on the numerous families of those mechanics and artisans which are thus maintained, and contemplate that ease and plenty, which is the constant as well as just reward of their incessant labours; if we combine with these the several tribes of active and busy people, who are continually employed in the building of ships . . . we may from thence form a competent idea of the prodigious value of our sugar colonies, and a just conception of their immense importance to the grandeur and prosperity of their mother country. . . .¹⁰

British wealth owed much to slavery, as the pro-slavers trumpeted for decades, and as Sidney Mintz has long maintained, ‘the slave plantation,

producing some basic commodity for the mother country, was a special emergent form of capitalist organization'.¹¹ But the slavery business was never just about the economy – values associated with it permeated the culture and politics of both metropolitan and colonial societies. In this essay I outline a few of the ways in which attention to this repressed history of capitalism both challenges and enriches our understanding of the genealogy of the modern.

Utilizing as our starting point Nick Draper's study of the compensation records (published as *The Price of Emancipation*, 2010), we have documented all the claimants to compensation at the time of emancipation – when twenty million pounds was paid to the slave-owners to secure their agreement to the loss of 'their property'.¹² Nearly half that money stayed in Britain, for the absentees, that is those whose primary residence was in Britain, dominated the ownership of the enslaved. Our biographical work has focused on the absentees, exploring their economic, political and cultural significance and the contribution they made to the development of modern Britain. Of these absentees twenty-one percent were women – but few of them owned large numbers of enslaved people. Our project has necessarily been the work of a team both because of the scale of the research and because we needed the skills of economic, political and cultural historians to document and analyse the legacies of these men and women. We have created an on-line encyclopedia with the fruits of our labour – www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs.

The material from phase one of our project suggests that at the micro-economic level the flow of human and financial capital from the British colonial slave-economy was a significant contributor to the remaking of Britain's commercial, and to a lesser extent industrial, fabric throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Wealth derived from slave-ownership was redeployed into the new colonies of white settlement and into multiple forms of consumption – from country-house building to connoisseurship. The planters continued to have political successes on some fronts – the securing of compensation and apprenticeship, the delays on the abolition of the sugar duties and the introduction of indentured labour. Furthermore, the slave-owners and their descendants were active agents in the re-making of race as a hierarchical category. Once slavery no longer fixed the African as inferior other legitimations for his/her subordination had to be found. In the debates over race in the mid nineteenth century, and the shift from the ascendancy of abolitionist humanitarian discourse to a harsher version of stadial theory (envisioning the civilizational process as glacially slow), historians, novelists and travel-writers with slave-owning origins played a significant part. They used their eye-witness experience to assert the veracity of their characterizations of racial difference.

Our current project – 'The structure and significance of British Caribbean slave-ownership 1763–1833' – seeks to systematically analyse slave-ownership and its consequences for Britain across that period.¹³ We are

establishing patterns of ownership across the 4,000 plus estates. This time the sources we are using will enable us to collect material on the lives of the enslaved – clearly a vital part of any study of slave-ownership which must necessarily be embedded in the master/slave relationship. Once again our data will be made publicly available so that by 2016 we should be able to provide a formidable research tool. Our particular focus as a research team will be on the absentees and their legacies, tracing their commercial, political and cultural presence and impact on Britain and allowing us to re-examine the relationship between slavery, empire and the early imperial nation. My own research is focused on the writings of the slave-owners, particularly at this stage those based in Jamaica, trying to grasp how they understood the world which they were making and how it was organized through the marking of racial and gendered difference.

In the classical accounts of the development of industrial capitalism the factory workers were waged labourers – exploited but in possession of their own labouring bodies. In the colonies, however, the workers were enslaved. At the time of emancipation there were approximately 670,000 enslaved people working in the plantations, pens and houses of the slave-owners. In the parlance of the planters these men, women and children were stock, commodities like other commodities. ‘As our trade esteemed Negroe labourers merely a commodity, or *chose* in merchandize’, wrote Edward Long in his outraged *Candid Reflections* on Lord Mansfield’s judgement in the Somerset case,

so the parliament of Great Britain has uniformly adhered to the same idea; and hence the planters were naturally induced to frame their colony acts and customs agreeable to this, which may be termed the *national sense*, and deemed their negroes to be fit objects of purchase and sale, transferrable like any other goods and chattels: they conceived their right of property *to have and to hold*, acquired by purchase, inheritance, or grant, to be as strong, just, legal, indefeasible, and compleat, as that of any other British merchant over the goods in his warehouse.¹⁴

The slave was not regarded as a subject but as a property, albeit a special kind of property. First of all s/he was merchandise when bought and sold in the slave trade. Once acquired by a planter s/he became private property, regarded as in part a chattel, in part as real property. Men and women were ‘stock’, counted alongside cattle and sugar mills. And ‘the idea of slaves as property was as firmly accepted in the law of England as it was in that of the colonies’.¹⁵ It was always clear, however, that a slave was not simply a ‘thing’ – s/he was not a commodity like any other. Slaves were both property and persons – persons who could be prosecuted for theft or rebellion – yet if they were executed their owners received compensation. The black body was commodified and when a slave died the owner lost capital – yet enslaved people refused commodification. While labour may at one level be treated as

abstract, in life it was embodied – gendered, raced and aged. The price of an enslaved man was significantly more than that of a woman, particularly if the man was skilled, despite women’s centrality to reproduction. Not all Africans were enslaved, but virtually all slaves were of colour. Racial otherness came to justify a subordinated status. Law was not the original basis for slavery, as Elsa Goveia has argued, but the slave codes of the British Caribbean were essential for its continuance.¹⁶ A whole system of laws was built up – and it was on this basis that the owners received compensation when slavery was abolished.

Slavery was distinguished from other forms of servitude by its permanence and by its degree of commodification, it was perpetual and inheritable. As Orlando Patterson has insisted slavery was a form of ‘natal alienation’: alienated from all rights or claims of birth, denied any claims or obligations to their parents, the enslaved had no right to any legitimate social order. They were born into and lived under the domination of their masters. For men the loss of their manhood was central to their subordination. For women their sexual subjection to their master and the absence of rights over the children they had borne encapsulated the lack of control over their own bodies. The destruction of familial roles, the denial of paternal authority and the ever-present maternal fear of losing the daughter to the predatory desires of the master have been for Patterson ‘the single most destructive feature of slavery and the one that has had the most lasting effect on black life’.¹⁷ The blood of which Marx wrote was not only the blood shed by workers, blood ties were critical to the forging of colonial slavery and to the formation of planter capital.

The delineation of enslaved black men and women as property had as its counterpoint the naming of whiteness as a different kind of property – the property of freedom – access to public and private privileges, the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one’s own life rather than being the object of others’ domination.¹⁸ A set of assumptions, privileges and benefits were attached to being white in colonial society that became legitimated, affirmed and protected by law. Black racial identity marked those who were enslaved, white marked those who were free. As Bryan Edwards, slave-owner, historian and MP, wrote in his *History of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793), there is ‘something of a marked and predominant character common to all the White residents’:

... the leading feature is an independent spirit, and a display of conscious equality, throughout all ranks and conditions. The poorest White person seems to consider himself nearly on a level with the richest, and, emboldened by this idea, approaches his employer with extended hand, and a freedom, which, in the countries of Europe, is seldom displayed by men in the lower orders of life towards their superiors. It is not difficult to trace the origin of this principle. It arises, without doubt, from the pre-eminence and distinction which are necessarily attached even to

the complexion of a White Man, in a country where, the complexion, generally speaking, distinguishes freedom from slavery.¹⁹

Edwards capitalized White, just as he capitalized Negro – these were two ‘classes’ of people – not different species as his friend and fellow historian Edward Long maintained, but ‘classes’ which could not be thought about or treated in the same way. Just as the usage of Negro collapsed colour with status and identified slavery as inherent in bodies, not a product of law and a system of labour,²⁰ so the usage of White collapsed colour with status, to be white and male was to be free, to have ownership of oneself and one’s own labour. White men had the right to hold public office, to sit on juries, to vote (if they held sufficient property), to carry arms, to move freely, and to engage in economic activities. White women bore children who were named as free. Just as slavery was passed through the mother so was freedom – hence the horror of white women associating with black men so that by the mid eighteenth century such relations were strictly taboo. The juridical determinants of slave and free status which derived from the maternal line were structured into the plantation system – yet fractured by the sexual relations which characterized colonial society. Whiteness was a slippery concept – was it a class or a species? How could it be secured? Race was to be read off the body – but it was not consistently legible. The boundaries of this artificial categorization were difficult to hold in place. It was possible to become white, Matthew Lewis noted after the time he spent on his Jamaican plantations.

The offspring of a white man and a black woman is a mulatto, the mulatto and black produce a sambo; from the mulatto and white comes a quadroon; from the quadroon and white the mustee; the child of a mustee by a white man is called a musteefino; while the children of a musteefino are free by law, and rank as white persons to all intents and purposes.²¹

The white fantasy was one of absolute power. In this society the master was the law – they were masters in ‘the kingdom of *T*’ as the abolitionist Ramsay described it.²² Those masters relied on both physical and symbolic power – the whip was the icon of white domination; symbolic whips were woven from many areas of culture – naming, branding and clothing. The fullest description we have of this mid eighteenth-century period comes from Thomas Thistlewood, a relatively small slave-owner, who emigrated in 1750 and died in 1786. For those years he kept an extraordinarily detailed diary which has been transcribed and written about by Douglas Hall and Trevor Burnard.²³ In Thistlewood’s world masters had complete licence to run their plantations and punish ‘their’ slaves as they chose. There were no restraints and the violence was terrible. Jamaican whites were notorious for their treatment of ‘their’ slaves and in his years on the island Thistlewood recorded only one white man who was disciplined over ill-treatment. Whites

felt themselves to be living in a dangerous world, a society at war, they were frightened and it was believed that this could only be controlled with severity. Africans were not Englishmen. The enslaved were kept cowed by arbitrary and tyrannical actions, always supported by the full weight of the authority of the state. White Jamaicans celebrated their 'land of liberty' where they enjoyed the rights of freeborn Englishmen, but that liberty was predicated on the symbolic and real infliction of terror on the bodies and minds of the enslaved.²⁴ While British industrial capitalism has been associated with the disciplinary regimes of the factory and the prison, the plantation system forcibly reminds us that other disciplinary regimes that operated directly and brutally on labourers' bodies were integral to the operation of capital.

White colonists went to Jamaica to make money: if they were successful they were likely to return to what was always defined as 'home' and become absentees in the mother country. Their plantations would then be managed by attorneys, weakening the white presence. Though himself an absentee, Long was seriously worried by the scale of absenteeism and by what he saw as the fragility of the white family – this put the survival of colonial society at risk. European societies were built on family and kin and systematically privileged men. These patterns were carried across the Atlantic and adapted to another place. Businesses were built on kin connections, marriage and inheritance were central to the transmission of property. As David Sabean and others have established in relation to continental Europe and Leonore Davidoff for Britain, systematic repeated alliances between families over many generations established tight bonds of reciprocity with large networks of kin.²⁵ Cousin and brother/sister marriages were one of the many strategies employed. This provided a form of security since groups were bound together in dense networks. Capital was not anonymous – it had 'blood' coursing through its veins and this had implications for how it functioned on both sides of the Atlantic. Given the dearth of commercial, professional and financial infrastructures and the vulnerability to disease and early death, familial relations became a touchstone of commercial as well as professional trustworthiness, limiting risks in times of huge risk. The strength of these networks was particularly crucial in places like Jamaica where death and disease were rife and white mortality was staggeringly high. The status of the white family with its extended elite connections was critical to the survival of white patriarchal domination.

The Long family were part of this elite white world, crossing England and Jamaica, cementing colonial power. The family had been in Jamaica since it was first conquered by Oliver Cromwell's forces, led by Penn and Venables, in 1655. Samuel Long was on the original expedition, acting as Secretary to the four Commissioners appointed by Cromwell. The expedition was badly planned and resourced and it took at least two years to beat off the Spanish who had been in occupation, but by 1657 the advantages that the island offered had become clear to some at least. Land grants were awarded to the

soldiers and many became 'red-hot planters'. Thirty-acre lots were being sold by 1660 and Samuel Long patented and purchased great tracts of land, accumulating between sixteen and eighteen thousand acres. His principal settlement was in Clarendon, where he had seven plantations that had already been established by the Spanish and had been used to grow provisions, indigo and sugar. He became a highly significant political figure, successfully challenging the effort by the crown to limit the rights of the colony to representative government. His son Charles returned to England about 1700 and bought an estate in Suffolk. He had married twice, both wives were daughters of West Indian governors and his second wife was the heiress of Sir William Beeston.²⁶ The Long and Beeston families became intimately connected. Beeston Long (named of course after his mother's connection) married into the Drake family and together they established a West Indian merchant house based in Fenchurch St – doing business with the East Indies too, as Clare Taylor has documented.²⁷ Around 1758 they were joined by Henry Dawkins, heir to huge Jamaican estates, and for decades Drake, Long and Dawkins traded in the West Indian and American markets. Charles Long lost his own and other people's fortunes in the South Sea Bubble and left his son Samuel, Edward Long's father, severely indebted. Samuel married Mary Tate, a woman with no fortune. Seriously short of money to support his growing family he was impelled to return to Jamaica to try and save the family estates, Lucky Valley and Longville, from the maladministration of his attorney. When he died in 1757 Edward, his second son, set sail for Jamaica. The following year Edward married Mary Ballard, widow of John Palmer, second daughter and eventual heir of Thomas Beckford, one of the Beckford clan. They too had been in Jamaica from early settlement and had extensive metropolitan and colonial business and political connections. Around 1750 the Beckfords, Ballards and Palmers between them owned nearly half of the cultivated land in Jamaica. The Longs were thus connected with key Jamaican planter families. One of Edward Long's daughters married a son of Henry Dawkins (a marriage that Dawkins strongly objected to on the grounds of money) and another married into the English aristocracy extending further their web of connection. These families all operated transatlantically – they were neither resident nor absentee on a permanent basis. But metropole and colony were different localities with very different sexual economies. For the most part the men aimed to live in England but when affairs required it they would return to Jamaica, knowing that slave-produced sugar was their surest route to riches. 'Uncle Beeston' was 'the kindly man of business' for the Longs, heading the firm, always ready to give advice, act as trustee or executor.²⁸ Kindly to his own family, he ran a slaving business that was anything but kind. The men in these networks did business and politics together, they took each other's sons into their households, gave advice on education and training, kept each other informed on metropolitan and colonial affairs. They were active in the defence of West Indian interests in

London – serving on the committee of the West India Merchants and Planters, organizing meetings, lobbying men of influence and providing evidence to the parliamentary inquiries which threatened them once the movement for abolition had gained strength in the 1780s.

The control of their wives' property and their capacity to manage the distribution of their own after death were critical tools in the maintenance of patriarchal power. Strict settlement and entail were employed to keep control over family property. Sons were always privileged over daughters. Henry Dawkins's will distributed his landed properties amongst his sons, while his daughters received marriage portions in money.²⁹ In cases of intestacy there were clear regulations over dower, all land went to the eldest son and personal property was divided between the children. Sometimes first sons were left all the property – sometimes it was divided between brothers. There may have been particular reluctance to leave Jamaican property to daughters – running a plantation was not work for a woman. Trevor Burnard has found that female inheritance was severely restricted up to the mid eighteenth century at least and there was no provision in Jamaica's Court of Chancery for marriage settlements for women.³⁰ Daughters were more likely to be left money, usually paid on marriage, and marrying a West Indian heiress became a well-known route to riches in the late eighteenth century. Women were critical to the transmission of property through marriage, widowhood and the bearing of children. Their subordinate legal status secured men's dominance. William Beckford had no scruples in taking advantage of his brother's early death to seize his properties, effectively disinheriting his mother and leading to a long legal battle.³¹

Families were full of tensions and rivalries which could weaken and fragment familial power. A wife who displeased her husband could find herself cast out on a meagre annuity – as Edward Long's mother Mary Tate did. The art of growing rich, went a saying in Jamaica, was to marry and bury. Women's mortality was marginally better than men's, they were frequently widowed and remarried. Male relatives could not be relied on for support. Edward Long's sister Charlotte, for example, was locked in conflict with her brother-in-law after the death of her husband. She was pregnant when her husband, George Ellis, an extensive plantation-owner, died. He had made a will in which he bequeathed her dower of £1200 but no provision had been made for the child. His brother John immediately claimed the whole property bar the annuity. Their friends and relations were divided but eventually a settlement was made which secured provision if the child was a boy but only for his lifetime. The son George had to tread very carefully with his uncle and pursued a profession since he had no confidence that he would be able to secure any of his father's land. He wrote bitterly to his uncle Long of that 'deepest of all masks – that of apparent generosity'.³² Familial belonging did not always secure dividends.

Edward Long was right that the white family was a fragile formation – not only because of the mortality rates and familial conflicts but also

because of the prevalence of concubinage and the relative paucity of white women on the islands. White migration to Jamaica was initially heavily male and the demographic imbalance remained a major issue. Planters who became absentees often left a mistress on the island and married in the mother country to secure legitimate heirs – William Beckford was one of many. The longing for ‘exotic otherness’ enthralled white men and sexual desire cut across lines of racial belonging. Every white man had his ‘house-keeper’, as numerous contemporaries noted, and the children of these mixed relationships became the free population of colour who increasingly peopled the island.³³ Edward Long was particularly condemnatory of this practice, hating the scale of miscegenation and its effects. In his mind it was this which prevented the development of an ‘improved’ and civilized society, one built on ‘proper’ familial relations. ‘Intemperance and sensuality are the fatal instruments which, in this island, have committed...havoc’, he believed.

It is a question easily answered, whether...it would be more for the interest of Britain, that Jamaica should be possessed and peopled by white inhabitants, or by Negroes and Mulattos?...it might be much better for Britain, and Jamaica too, if the white men in that colony would abate of their infatuated attachments to black women, and instead of being ‘grac’d with a *yellow offspring not their own*’ perform the duty incumbent on every good citizen, by raising in honourable wedlock a race of unadulterated beings.

He bemoaned the ways in which men became enslaved by their passions, abject in the face of the manipulations of their grasping lovers, producing ‘a vast addition of spurious offsprings of different complexions’ rather than legitimate white sons and daughters.³⁴ No shame was felt in this ‘torrid clime’, where, as Bryan Edwards wrote, many considered ‘a family as an encumbrance’ and marriage was held in ‘but little estimation’.³⁵ Some men left their wives in England and lived with their mistresses in the colony. Rich bachelors were common – like Simon Taylor, one of the wealthiest of Jamaican planters in the late eighteenth century, who, as Lady Nugent noted, had ‘a numerous family, some almost on every one of his estates’.³⁶ Taylor left the bulk of his property to his nephews in England – ensuring the continuity of the white male line. But he also left a large sum of money and an annuity to one of his mistresses and a granddaughter received compensation for one enslaved person, willed to her by her grandfather, after abolition. She was living in London in the 1830s and is recorded as having married a chemist in 1848 – her life a far cry from that of her planter grandfather.³⁷ Like many others, Taylor’s illegitimate children were the product of a power relationship. Yet that power, which was one of the cements of slave society, also presaged its dissolution. Many of these white fathers clearly felt some responsibility or affection for their mixed-race

children. They provided for them in their wills, albeit on a very different scale from legitimate children. This meant that familial property was fragmented and that people of colour became significant owners. Attempts were made to legislate against substantial legacies to ‘mulattoes’ but these restrictions could always be avoided through acts of the House of Assembly. In the age of revolution people of colour claimed rights, some of which were reluctantly granted in 1829 in Jamaica. But the refusal of the white population to share their privileges meant that they could not hope for the support of the ‘browns’ in the face of slave rebellion and abolition. As the white population failed to reproduce itself and shrank in relation to the ‘browns’ and the ‘blacks’ the project of white domination was doomed – albeit only in some respects. A white/black binary cannot capture the political complexities around emancipation and its aftermath any more than a class analysis can give us a full account of the development of industrial capitalism.

Women’s economic independence was severely restricted in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century England as numerous studies have shown, the law of coverture which prevented married women from owning property in their own right being only the most obvious legal restriction. In Jamaica there were even more difficulties since running a plantation depended on white men’s physical power. Edward Long conducted a survey of landownership in 1750, recording full names and acreage. Out of a total of 1,575 landholders where it is possible, as James Dawkins has calculated, to establish gender – eighty-four percent were men, eleven percent women. Ninety percent of the land was held by men, only four percent by women.³⁸ In other words not only were men the vast majority of landowners – they also owned nearly all of the land. The parish of St Catherine, in which the capital Spanish Town was situated, had the largest number of women owners – probably linked to urban ownership.³⁹ This compares most interestingly with the figures we have established in relation to the compensation claims. Of the 47,000 individual claims registered after emancipation approximately forty-one percent were made by women. Yet only twenty-one percent of the absentee claimants were women. This points to the very large numbers of women in the Caribbean owning property in the enslaved. The majority of these women, who were single or widowed, were small owners and they were almost certainly women of colour (something which is rarely recorded). In Christer Petley’s analysis of ownership in St James, a parish in Jamaica, in the early 1800s, he found that over ten percent of the registered land was owned by women, and two-thirds of these had fewer than five slaves.⁴⁰ Of course many men had small numbers of slaves too but the vast majority of the enslaved were owned by large planters, virtually all of whom were men. In the unusual cases where there was a woman owner with large numbers of enslaved people she would have to rely on a male attorney to manage the property for her. Many of the small women owners were in the urban centres, perhaps with two or three enslaved women whom they hired out as domestics. Others were landladies, with hotels, brothels or

eating places – service-providers for the urban population. A typical example would be Ann Marryat, (though in this case she was in British Guiana), who successfully claimed compensation for thirteen enslaved men and women.⁴¹

Ann Marryat was the illegitimate daughter of Joseph Marryat, a key supporter of the West India interest. He was one of the most articulate of the absentee slave-owners, with properties in Trinidad, Grenada, Jamaica and St Lucia. In 1807 he petitioned parliament against the abolition of the slave trade and while an MP he spoke vociferously in defence of the trade and of slavery and against the equalization of East Indian and West Indian sugar duties.⁴² He published numerous pamphlets – most notably his *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Civilization of Africa* in 1816, which was part of a long running controversy with the leading abolitionists James Stephen and Zachary Macaulay. At his death in 1824 he was said to be worth half a million. His illegitimate daughter Ann was the product of an early liaison with ‘my negroe slave commonly known as Fanny’ – but he manumitted her in 1790 and she was able to establish herself independently.⁴³ Like many women of colour she did not marry though she lived with a man, thus keeping control of her ‘property’. Marryat’s wealth was divided between his legitimate children at his death – his sons received his property in Britain and the Caribbean, his daughters received £10,000 each while Ann fared very differently.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the scale of women’s ownership in the Caribbean marks one of the ways in which the colony opened up possibilities for women – particularly if they were unmarried or widowed as so many were in a society in which marriage was marginalized. This was of considerable significance in post-emancipation society – Jamaica has long had a tradition of single women, now married too, in business, commerce, and more recently government.

The failure of white society to reproduce itself meant that Jamaica could never become a settler society as the North American colonies did.⁴⁵ Rather it became a society with a majority population of black and brown people ensuring that it would never be the place that Long desired – one dominated by white men of taste who would ensure that order and hierarchy were properly maintained. At the same time the denial and destruction of the black family has had profound and long-term effects – shaping the patterns of Jamaican society into the present and with destructive echoes in the metropole. Gender and race structured the organization of property and power in slave society. But they did more than this – they were historically dynamic axes of change. Gender and race both cemented and dissolved the slave system. White men’s power was secured in part through the subordination of white women and the control that could be exercised over their property. White men’s use of sexuality as a form of power and control over the black population acted to emasculate black men and terrorize black women. But at the same time it dissolved those controls, since the brown population, the product of desire for otherness, gradually came to exceed the

white, and the claims by people of colour, alongside those of the black majority, disrupted efforts at white domination. Furthermore the figure of the lascivious and immoral slave-owner was utilized by the humanitarians as one of the rallying cries for the abolition of slavery. Women activists in particular highlighted the immorality of slavery by drawing attention to the predatory sexuality of corrupted white men, the enforced separation of mothers from children and the lack of support for the family.

* * *

‘Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt’, wrote Marx. The blood we could associate with the blood lines of familial capitalism and with women’s bodies – as objects of desire, as workers in the cane fields, as bearers of children, as transmitters of capital – whether the capital of the heiress or the capital of labour reproduced. The dirt carries connotations with the plantation as much as with the cotton factories. This compels us to rethink the classical accounts of industrial capitalism, dominated by the mill and the emaciated body of the factory worker. The clues are there for us to follow – the task of critical historians is to make out what has been forgotten.

The trauma of slavery is not over. It lives on in the structural inequalities that disfigure both Jamaican and British society, in the gun culture of the inner cities, in the crises of black masculinity, in the appalling figures for ill-health and illiteracy which are characteristic of the contemporary Caribbean and which are mirrored in the rates of black under-achievement and mental illness in this society. The memory work that we seek to facilitate through our project – the critical appraisal of the past as ‘a time that is not yet past and which continues to disfigure the present and foreclose the future’ – involves the recognition of the persistent privileges that have belonged to whiteness, the persistent poverty of the Caribbean that has been, as David Scott argues, ‘a constituting condition for ill-gotten European prosperity’.⁴⁶ The movement for reparations is growing apace in the Caribbean. Reparation will need to take many forms – a necessary precondition for this is remembering – forgetting took work, remembering takes work too. There is much work to be done.

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