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**Producers, Reproducers and Rebels:
Grenadian Slave Women 1783-1838**

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EDITORS NOTE

Working Paper No.10 is written by Grenadian historian, Dr. Nicole Laurine Phillip who is the first recipient of the 2002 Julien Fédon Memorial prize for her outstanding work as a postgraduate student in history.

In this paper Dr. Phillip examines three important questions in relation to Grenadian slave women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She questions whether slave women provided the dominant agricultural labour on the sugar cane plantation. She assesses the success of the planters' attempts to increase the slave population by natural means. Finally she investigates the different forms of resistance that slave women took against slavery.

Dr. Phillip demonstrates that enslaved women in Grenada were not only valuable as sources of labour but as reproducers of future labour power. As the threats to end the slave trade became apparent, West Indian planters sought to conserve the existing slave population by devising measures to increase the population through various strategies. Dr. Phillip argues that these measures failed because of the resistance of enslaved women.

Dr. Phillip gives the enslaved women agency by showing how they retaliated against the system in a number of ways. Among other forms of resistance the enslaved women ran

away, practiced abortion, encouraged others not to work, and withheld their children from labour.

The publication of Dr Phillips' work underscores the commitment of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies to disseminate the work of a new generation of Caribbean scholars.

KEY WORDS

Caribbean history, slavery and enslaved women, women and history, slave resistance, Grenadian history, women in Grenada.

INTRODUCTION

SLAVE EYES

*Not again, Massa, not again
Spare me pain, man, the pain, the pain*

*Why? Is it because you see fire in my eyes?
The smirk in my smile?
The royalty in the way I rise?*

*Why? Is it because I conquer all that prevails?
You do not like my ways?
The hypocrisy in my gaze?*

*It's all true, Massa, it's all true
But please, not the whipping,
Not the flogging,
Not the pain.
But you don't understand when I speak with my eyes,
So I might as well runaway, runaway. (Roberts 2000).*

A major rethinking of Caribbean historical discourse on slavery has placed the role of women at centre stage. Ground-breaking work has been done by Lucille Mair (1975), Hilary Beckles (1989), Barbara Bush (1990), and Barry Higman (1984), among others. These historians have shown that slave women provided the dominant agricultural labour input on British Caribbean sugar plantations from at least the end of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, there was an increased dependence upon women for reproduction of plantation labour. This dual role placed the women at the centre of planter strategies designed to ensure the survival of the slave system (Beckles 1989: 2). The slave woman

was also shown as a rebel. These studies however have been predominantly on the larger islands (Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados). This paper seeks to answer the following questions: Did Grenadian slave women provide the dominant agricultural labour on the sugar cane plantation? How successful were the planters' attempts at natural increase? What forms of resistance did slave women take against slavery?

From the onset of the slave trade to the Caribbean, female slaves were imported in smaller numbers than male slaves. This was so for Grenada in particular and the other colonies in general (British, French and Dutch Colonies). By 1788 slave owners in Grenada estimated the proportion of male to female slaves at 5:3. They further noted that, in imports from Africa, the number of males in "a well assorted cargo" usually exceeded that of females in proportion of two to one.¹ In a list of slaves sold to Grenada after its restoration to the British² between 1784 and 1788, 8,216 male slaves and 5,346 female slaves were bought.³ The planters also paid lower prices for female than male slaves. In response to an inquiry by agents for West Indian Affairs in 1788, the spokesman for the Grenadian plantocracy was noted as saying:

¹ C.O. 101/29 Answers to questions submitted to the agents for West Indian Affairs, 28 May 1788.

² Grenada was French from 1664- 1763. The island was ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The island was recaptured by the French in 1779 until 1783 when it was restored to the British.

³ C.O. 101/28 List of Slaves in Grenada since its restoration to the English, 1784 – 1788.

Putting tradesmen and drivers out of the question and speaking only of able healthy young field slaves, the average value of a creole man of that description may be stated at present in Grenada at sixty pounds sterling and that of a creole woman at fifty pounds sterling.⁴

While it could be argued that the price difference was small, there were fewer African females imported than males. Studies available⁵ on the relationship between mortality and sex in the Atlantic slave trade make it evident that mortality rates of females were the same as or even less than those of males of the same age group (Klein:1983: 35).

FEMALE AND MALE SLAVES IN GRENADA

Throughout the British slave colonies there was a tendency for the normalization of sex ratios, moving from a male predominance under frontier conditions to female predominance with maturity. In the case of Grenada there is evidence of female predominance as early 1812 as Table 1 illustrates.

⁴ C.O. 101/29 Answers to questions submitted to the agents for West Indian Affairs 28 May 1788.

⁵ According to the House of Lords listing for the English Atlantic Slave Trade in the late 18th century, mortality among adult Africans averaged 6% for women and 5% for men. Among children the mortality rates were higher, but differed little sexually with females averaging 11% mortality in the Atlantic crossing and males 13%.

TABLE 1
Female and Male Slaves in Grenada 1812 to 1825

Year	Male slaves	Female slaves	Percentage of female slaves
1812	14.352	14.439	50.15
1813	14.026	14.156	50.23
1814	13.074	14.005	51.72
1815	13.484	13.766	50.52
1816	13.45	13.783	50.61
1817	13.510	14.188	51.22
1818	13.328	14.087	51.38
1819	13.155	13.905	51.39
1820	13.022	13.878	51.59
1821	12.398	13.269	51.70
1822	12.355	13.231	51.86
1823	12.258	13.052	51.57
1824	12.101	12.871	51.54
1825	12.057	12.840	51.57

Source: Brigitte Kossek 'Women Slaves and Rebels in Grenada' in Thomas Bremer and Ulrich Fleischmann. Eds. *Alternative Cultures in the Caribbean* Vervuert: Verlag, 1993.

In Barbados as early as 1710 there was female predominance in the plantation field labour force, by 1756 the same was true for Jamaica. In the frontier period of Caribbean slavery, men, both white servants and African slaves, were placed in the field. However, as the economic landscape changed, white indentured servants moved out of the field into

managerial positions as bookkeepers and overseers. Slave men replaced them as artisans in the sugar works. An opening was left in the field. This space was taken up by the women. This is not to say that men did not work in the field, but that a much higher proportion of men than women were shifted into non-field jobs. Some scholars argue that the heavy placement of women in the field was due in part to a European perception of the 'drudge' status of African women in polygynous marriages. It also fell in line with their African tradition as agriculturists, along with a perception that skilled, mobile, and supervisory jobs "naturally" should be held by men not women (Bush 1990: 33, Klein 1983: 35).

In Grenada, female predominance in the field was seen after 1800. For example, in 1789 on the Lataste estate in the Parish of St. Patrick, there was still a male majority in the field: 48 men and 43 women.⁶ However by 1804, inventories for Lower and Upper Pearls Estates in the Parish of St. Andrew show a significant number of women in the fields. On the Lower Pearls Estate, of the 90 field slaves, 64 were women and 26 were men. Of the 11 domestics, 6 were men and 5 were women. All the elite jobs were taken by the men. There were 5 carpenters, 10 coopers, 2 blacksmiths, 3 masons, 3 boilers, 3 drivers, 20 carters and mule boys and 5 watchmen. On the Upper Pearls Estate of the 89 field slaves, 64 were women and 25 were men.⁷ Again the men dominated the elite jobs. By 1811, on

⁶ Moccas Mss : Lataste Plantation accounts and correspondences 1785- 1835, AF57/ 8B List of Negroes on the estate on the island of Grenada belonging to George Cornwall taken in March 1789. (Herefordshire Record Office, Hereford).

⁷ Chancery Masters Exhibits: C. 110/105 A No.5 Pearls Estates Annual Accounts 1804. An Abstract of the strength of Lower Pearl Estate. An Abstract of the strength of Upper Pearls Estate.