

Female Captive Mobilities and the 'Countervoyage' in the Luso-Atlantic World

Captive Mobilities: Slavery, Freedom, and Knowledge Production in Latin America and Beyond

University of Bristol, 15-16 September 2022

Dr Selina Patel Nascimento, Lancaster University¹

*Over and over again: the women-in-the-water; woman as water,
as a stormy, cavorting, cooling ocean, a raging stream, a
waterfall; as a limitless body of water that ships pass
through...woman as the enticing (or perilous) deep; as a cup of
bubbling body fluids; the vagina as wave, as foam...love as the
foam from the collision of two waves, as a sea voyage.*
Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*²

Introduction

In Paul Gilroy’s theoretical formulation of the Black Atlantic, the Middle Passage features heavily as the transtemporal diasporic tissue binding together Africans and their descendants across the Atlantic world. It stretches across the ocean, ruptures modern notions of the linearity of time; the Middle Passage forces us to continuously replay, remember and face the terrors and traumas of racialised violence that bleed into our everyday. Colin Dayan rightly interprets Gilroy’s emphasis on the rites of the Middle Passage ‘as a kind of origin myth for later chosen tales of ocean crossings by Wright, Du Bois, Douglass, and others who make a modern journey from the Americas to Europe.’³ For Dayan, Gilroy’s narrative intends to convey a diasporic history, in which the slave ship is rendered ‘as vessel of transit and means to knowledge,’ yet ironically ‘the slave ship, the Middle Passage, and finally slavery itself become frozen, things that can be referred to and looked back upon, but always wrenched out

¹ Lecturer in the History of the Global South: s.patelnascimento@lancaster.ac.uk.

² Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies, Vol. I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 283.

³ Joan Dayan (aka Colin Dayan), “Paul Gilroy’s Slaves, Ships, and Routes: The Middle Passage as Metaphor,” *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 1 (1996): 7.

of an historically specific continuum.’⁴ Treating the Middle Passage as an unanchored and static historical moment strips down the sheer terror of enslavement survived by millions of Africans over four centuries to its lowest common denominator of racialised violence. Shorn of historical specificity, the Middle Passage simply becomes metaphor for “crosscultural circulation” of the African diaspora. Yet mapping contemporary transatlantic passages of educated elite African Americans to Europe onto the Middle Passage alarmingly blurs distinctions between choice, agency, and forced migrations and serves to dilute the very meaning of enslavement.

What is striking about Gilroy’s treatment of the Middle Passage and the exile of African-Americans to Europe in the twentieth century is the marked temporal distinction between historical events, unanchored by specificities though the former may be. Dayan also notes how, for Gilroy, the Middle Passage was “then”, frozen in the past, while the eastward migrations of African Americans are part of our “now.” The roots of the African diaspora are very much founded in the routes; the westward transatlantic voyages of the enslaved in the past, and the eastward trajectories of their descendants in the present. This temporal disparity, the clean division of past from present, has been critiqued by Dayan and others, yet never in terms of the historical actuality of transatlantic captive mobilities. That Africans were enslaved and forced across the Atlantic to live out the rest of their days under atrocious conditions *only* in the Americas is a deep-seated belief that largely remains unchallenged. This paper challenges this assertion by calling into question the apparent reluctance among scholars to imagine a *constant* flow of enslaved Africans travelling from the colonial Americas east towards Europe simultaneous to the Middle Passage. Gilroy could see enslaved Africans only moving in one direction in the past, while free, educated African Americans are able to move in the opposite direction only once the Middle Passage ceased; a view largely, yet not entirely, shared by historians of transatlantic slavery.

Recent historians have recognised the presence, influence, and contributions of black enslaved and freed people in early modern Europe. Sue Peabody’s classic “*There are no slaves in France*” challenged this well-known adage by examining how black slaves living in eighteenth-century France negotiated the law courts and the Code Noir. Peabody thus pioneered an alternative historiographical treatment of enslaved Africans under the French empire, one that not only recognised the presence of black slaves in France, but also worked to

⁴ Ibid.

shatter the national narrative and myth that celebrated France’s claims to *liberté, égalité, fraternité* as it remained territorially and ideologically distinct from the colonies.⁵ Peabody’s work provided a platform for later historians to uncover the hidden stories of Europe’s enslaved black populations. Taking a different legal angle, Dienke Hondius has shown how the Dutch authorities actively sought to restrict enslaved Africans’ access to the Netherlands, but nevertheless were forced to accept a small black presence from the early seventeenth century.⁶ Gretchen H. Gerzina’s edited collection of essays *Britain’s Black Past* brings to life dozens of stories from the estimated 15,000 enslaved and free(d) black and mulatto people living in eighteenth-century England.⁷ Simon P. Newman’s most recent work has also shone a light on how enslaved black people living in seventeenth-century London fled their bondage in pursuit of freedom.⁸ Meanwhile, Jorge Manuel Rios da Fonseca’s study of slavery in sixteenth-century Lisbon confirms that one in every ten residents of the capital was of black African descent.⁹

While Peabody accedes that only a small fraction of France’s population would have been black (0.025%), and historians of imperial Britain and the Netherlands generally agree that there was a ‘limited presence’ of black Africans and Native Americans even by the eighteenth century, such low percentages were not the case in other parts of Europe.¹⁰ Fonseca’s work amply demonstrates that Seville’s black population from as early as the sixteenth century reached 8.71% of the city’s total, shortly behind early modern Lisbon’s figure of 9.95%, making the latter the European city with the highest percentage of black residents right through to the nineteenth century.¹¹ This more recent interpretation of black diasporic history that acknowledges African influences in Europe, however, falls short of any clear understanding of where the enslaved had arrived from and how they reached their destination.

Black captive mobilities and migrations to Europe during the era of transatlantic slavery remain under-researched. Any direct engagement with the theme usually comes from scholarly

⁵ Sue Peabody, “*There are no slaves in France*”: *The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 12.

⁶ Dienke Hondius, “Access to the Netherlands of Enslaved and Free Black Africans: Exploring Legal and Social Historical Practices in the Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no.3 (2011): 377-395.

⁷ Gretchen H. Gerzina (ed.) *Britain’s Black Past* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

⁸ Simon P. Newman, *Freedom Seekers: Escaping from Slavery in Restoration London* (London: University of London Press, 2022).

⁹ Jorge Manuel Rios da Fonseca, “Escravos e senhores na Lisboa quinhentista.” PhD diss., Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2008, p. 143.

¹⁰ Peabody, “*There are no slaves in France*,” p.4; Hondius, “Access to the Netherlands,” p. 380; Catherine Molineux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), p.5.

¹¹ Fonseca, “Escravos e senhores na Lisboa quinhentista,” p. 159.

analysis of “extraordinary” autobiographies of enslaved and freed black African Americans. Olaudah Equiano’s and Ignatius Sancho’s journeys to England from the Americas are implicitly proof of the exception to the rule of one-way transatlantic slave traffic.¹² The larger body of research into black European populations, some of which has been discussed above, recoils from any sustained attempt to understand how and why they had arrived. Usually, the fact of their arrival onto European soil is mentioned solely as a precursor to analysis rather than a serious subject for further interrogation. Antonio de Almeida Mendes has sought to reconstruct a fuller migration narrative that draws together the maritime journey and overland settlement of African women in early modern Portugal to understand the dynamics of identity formation, assimilation, and exclusion in Portuguese society.¹³ Nevertheless, the paucity of research into the maritime dimensions of Black slave traffic into Europe remains conspicuous. Indeed, the consistent use of the term “Africans” in current scholarship suggests an underlying assumption that black enslaved Europeans had been shipped directly from the African coastal areas.

This strange assumption flies in the face of decades of scholarly research that has shown beyond any doubt that practically all ships departing from West-Central African ports set sail for the Americas. Over four centuries, thousands upon thousands of maritime vessels departed the west coast of Africa and sailed to the New World colonies, transporting millions of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean on what quickly became known as the Middle Passage. Even those who eventually returned to Europe, as in the case of Portuguese vessels departing from Lisbon, would make the journey to the Americas before re-crossing the Atlantic back to the Old World.¹⁴ In this paper, I seek to nuance the historiography of the Middle Passage and expand on our understanding of maritime captive mobilities by challenging the assumption that African Europeans must necessarily have arrived directly from the African continent. Instead of simply conceiving of black geographies as following pre-determined trajectories that replicate colonial configurations of race, identity, and mobility, I suggest here that a broader conceptualization of enslaved mobilities, particularly those of female captives, which runs

¹² For example, Collins, Janelle. "Passage to Slavery, Passage to Freedom: Olaudah Equiano and the Sea." *The Midwest Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2006): 209-223; Brycchan Carey, "'The Extraordinary Negro': Ignatius Sancho, Joseph Jekyll, and the Problem of Biography," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26 (2003):1-14.

¹³ António de Almeida Mendes, "Africaines esclaves au Portugal:dynamiques d'exclusion, d'integration et d'assimilation à l'époque moderne (XV e –XVe siècles)," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 31, no. 2 (2008): 45-65.

¹⁴ Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, "The Atlantic Slave Trade to Maranhão, 1680-1846: Volume, Routes, and Organisation," *Slavery and Abolition* 29, no. 4 (2008): 488.

counter to the predominant and pre-defined geographical currents, can contribute to a dismantling of national narratives and ideologies that simultaneously deem black populations as “un-geographic” and contain them as fixed within certain historical moment.¹⁵

While the presence of enslaved Africans and their descendants living in imperial European cities can no longer be denied, myths and assumptions centred on the human geographies of black people still underscore historiographies of transatlantic slavery. Chronicling a millennium of black African presence in Europe, Olivette Otele’s masterful study is an important call for scholars to break down the correlative relationship between the Age of Discoveries, the transatlantic slave trade, and black Europeans.¹⁶ Her work challenges us to reorient our questions to consider transatlantic slavery as a moment of rupture and change for African Europeans rather than as the point of origin for the presence of black Africans in Europe. Instead of clinging to the assumption that black Africans were first “introduced” to Europe at the dawn of the transatlantic slave trade, we must look beyond the dominant narratives that constrain our renderings of the past to unearth untold histories. Otele’s research is a clear reminder that new histories which defy national biases, and in doing so expose them, are vital to historiographical efforts to build a more nuanced and complete picture of the past.

This paper contributes to this effort by bringing to the fore what Stephanie E. Smallwood calls a “counter-history,” a history accountable to the enslaved. Its narration requires engagement with the “counter-fact,” which Smallwood describes as ‘the fact the archive is seeking to ignore, marginalise, and disavow – the detail it does not want to animate and make narratable.’¹⁷ In the first instance, this paper draws on the counter-fact of what I term the “countervoyage,” the fact of enslaved Africans and their descendants completing transatlantic voyages that moved geographically, spatially, and figuratively against the dominant current of maritime captive mobilities. Following Otele’s exposure of a counter-history that places black Africans in Europe well before the rise of transatlantic slavery, I offer another counter-history to disassemble the assumption that the coastal ports of West-Central Africa were points of origin for enslaved maritime voyages travelling in a westerly direction towards to the American colonies. I aim to decolonise historiographical understandings of

¹⁵ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiii; LaToya Eaves, “Black Geographic Possibilities: On a Queer Black South,” *Southeastern Geographer* 57, no. 1 (2017): 84.

¹⁶ Olivette Otele, *African Europeans: An Untold History* (London: Hurst, 2020).

¹⁷ Stephanie E. Smallwood, “The Politics of the Archive and History’s Accountability to the Enslaved,” *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 6, no. 2 (2016): 125.

maritime female captive mobilities in the Luso-Atlantic world by exploring their alternative geographies that disrupted neat separations of metropolitan and colonial space as they entered Portuguese territories in Europe not from Africa, but from the American colonies, on their countervoyages. This paper considers the different types of countervoyage journeys that crisscrossed the Lusophone Atlantic and expands on our understandings of why these voyages were undertaken. In doing so, it highlights the high frequency of captive mobilities moving against the current of dominant slave traffic and confirms that a constant flow of enslaved migrants travelling from the Americas to Europe is evident over at least three centuries.

This paper then explores in further detail how black female place-making redefined the technology of Portuguese ocean-going vessels through corporeal positioning and use of Luso-Atlantic maritime space. It argues that in contrast to black enslaved populations in imperial France and Britain, young girls and adult women comprised the majority of captives undertaking the Luso-Atlantic countervoyage and settling in mainland Portugal or its island territories. As such, female captives were integral to charting alternate, Black cartographies of the Portuguese empire. In light of Afro-Brazilian women’s centrality to redefining Portuguese notions of imperial and colonial space, this paper suggests that the (gendered) experience of the countervoyage formed a crucial component of these cognitive remappings. Finally, I make some concluding remarks to consider how we might begin theorising the counter-history of countervoyages. With further research, I seek to elaborate on this theorisation to form the basis of a conceptual and analytical tool (the “counter-voyage”) for historians to explore captive mobilities across the Atlantic world in ways that effectively utilise South Atlantic epistemologies in broader contexts.

A note on methodology. The archive is peppered with snippets, fragments, traces, and echoes of the “counter-fact” of the countervoyage, their very dispersal animating a lack of coherence that dissembles any clear narrative. But these morsels of archival material can be read together to offer an alternative history that does not necessarily conform to the constraints of neat narration and complete coherence. This paper does not pretend to outline a single narrative of “the” countervoyage. It deliberately cites/sites a range of characters, stories, routes, and moments in the lives of Afro-Brazilian captives moving through the Lusophone Atlantic *without* connecting them together to create instead a counter-history that resists a metanarrative of Luso-Atlantic captive mobilities and emphasises enslaved Afro-Brazilian knowledge production and experiences. This non-linearity is an attempt to capture some of the fluidity of these mobilities and relay what Walter Johnson has emphasised as the multiple temporal frames

and temporalities - ‘a way of being in time’ - that intersected and intertwined in histories of Atlantic slavery.¹⁸ I employ a range of different archival sources, including import tax collections, Inquisitorial processes and petitions for legal marriage to locate Afro-Brazilian women living in Portugal and reconstruct something of their countervoyages through the extensive use of secondary literature to enable historians to gain a sense of the extent to which the countervoyage is conspicuously absent from the archive and broader Eurocentric metanarratives that seek to disavow the presence of colonial bodies in metropolitan spaces.

Reversing Sail: Afro-Brazilian Women’s Countervoyages

Emancipatory Countervoyages

Mariana and Carlota were forced to leave Rio de Janeiro, the only home they had known, to accompany their enslaver Jacinto de Araújo to Lisbon, ‘simply with the intention for her [Mariana] to serve his family on the voyage.’¹⁹ We do not know the exact vessel, date, or itinerary of Mariana’s countervoyage. It is likely she arrived in Lisbon at the turn of the nineteenth century or in the early 1800s at the latest.²⁰ Like many other enslaved Afro-Brazilian women and young girls, Mariana and Carlota made the countervoyage to Lisbon to facilitate the journey for their enslavers. In the eighteenth century, one Teresa de Jesus had accompanied her female owner from Bahia to Portugal, while Marcelina Maria was brought over to Lisbon as a young girl by her enslaver João Eufrásio de Figueiroa as his personal (and sexual) attendant.²¹ On these oceanic voyages, they would continue to provide the productive, reproductive, and sexual services they were forced to give on land.

Unlike the specific horrors of confinement and frequent immobilisation that characterised the Middle Passage, the countervoyage in a Luso-Atlantic context was for the most part a female experience of exhausting and exhaustive onboard service to their enslavers. Although female captives on the Middle Passage did have greater freedom of movement on

¹⁸ Walter Johnson, ‘Possible Pasts: Some Speculations on Time, Temporality, and the History of Atlantic Slavery,’ *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 45, no.4 (2000): 490.

¹⁹ ANTT, Feitos Findos, Juízo da Índia e Mina, mc. 31, no. 2, cx. 155, f. 10.

²⁰ Mariana later had another child, Henriqueta, who was born in Lisbon. By 1822, Henriqueta was at least an adolescent, if not already an adult woman, indicating that Mariana must have arrived by the early 1800s at the latest.

²¹ For Teresa de Jesus, see Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia, Seção Colonial, maço 572-1: Casa da Suplicação. Cópia da Sentença proferida em 9 de maio de 1772. For Marcelina Maria, see Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 631.

slaving voyages, partly based on the crew’s assumption that women posed no serious security threat, their shipboard mobility did not mirror that of enslaved women on the countervoyage.²² On the Middle Passage, enslaved African women were regularly confined and contained in the hold for long periods, despite their occasional access to the upper decks. Female captives on the countervoyage were constantly on the move all over the ship but spent much longer periods of the day on the upper decks engaged in domestic tasks necessary to maintain a comfortable journey for their enslavers. In other words, they moved about freely in strict unfreedom, confined spatially and ideologically in their enslavement aboard a countervoyage. However, as will be discussed in the next section, we must remain cognisant to the constant sexual threat of rape for all enslaved women that permeated the space of the upper decks.²³

The Middle Passage was a transformative transatlantic voyage fundamental to reinforcing the initial processes of capture, enslavement and commodification, bringing home the notion that human beings were now chattel. Discussions of the subject continue to emulate a static notion of enslavement as immobilisation: the wrenching of an individual from their African homeland to be carried overseas and “held” in captivity to toil on a single plantation for eternity. For Mariana however, the countervoyage did not form part of a singular process of enslavement and immobilisation. Born enslaved in Rio de Janeiro, slavery was etched into the very fabric of her social world. Rather than ‘becoming’ a commodity on this transatlantic crossing, Mariana re-enacted her commodification aboard the ship, replicating and reinforcing her status as an enslaved person through her service to her owner and carrying her understandings of colonial enslavement to a metropolitan context.²⁴

Accompanying enslavers on the countervoyage was a common experience for women and young girls in the Luso-Atlantic world. Once they had arrived on European shores, re-sale of Afro-Brazilian captives was a regular occurrence, with some captives being sold to other

²² Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, p. 143.

²³ Jennifer L. Morgan, “Accounting for ‘The Most Excruciating Torment’: Gender, Slavery and Trans-Atlantic Passages,” *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 6, no. 2 (2016): 196.

²⁴ Carlota’s presence on this countervoyage is puzzling and points to the complex significance of alternative transatlantic slave voyages. Her mother Mariana is an enslaved *carioca* and according to the *partus sequitur ventrum* legal doctrine in colonial Brazil, her offspring was also born into slavery. However, testimony from Jacinto de Araújo only refers to Mariana as an enslaved woman and makes no mention of Carlota’s enslaved status. Thus, it is possible that Carlota had been manumitted already, or that Araújo thought her enslavement was obvious given her mother’s slave status. Either way, only Mariana’s slavery is discussed in his testimony and remains the crux of their legal battle. However, if Carlota has been manumitted, this would distinctly change the character and meaning of their countervoyage, as enslaved mother and freed daughter travelled together but would likely have been engaged in different tasks throughout the voyage.

parts of Europe, such as Britain or the Netherlands.²⁵ Most frequently, female captives remained in towns and cities within Portugal. They may have continued to serve their owners in their new homes, or they might be sent to live with their enslaver’s relatives or friends. Female captives were sometimes later threatened with a re-sale to the extremely difficult conditions of the northern Portuguese American territories of Maranhão or Pará, usually as a punishment for insubordination or because they were considered ‘defective’, as was the case with the enslaved women Catarina and Engrácia Maria in 1783.²⁶

Unlike most of their peers, however, Mariana and Carlota were forced to make the countervoyage with their enslaver ‘simply’ for his family’s service during the voyage and ‘she [Mariana] was to return to Rio...luckily, due to the lack of transport provided, she had still not been sent back to the said destination.’²⁷ Mariana’s black enslaved body was to return to its rightful geographical space of the Portuguese colonies, where crucially it would remain enslaved. With her return, the countervoyage would be reversed, or even negated, and imperial order would once more be restored, maintaining black bodies in slavery instead of freedom. However, Mariana refused to accede to dominant imperial cartographies that ideologically mapped slavery onto colonial territories and confined black (enslaved) bodies within the New World. Mariana’s personal geographies highlight an alternative vision of imperial cartographies in ways that account for the fundamental presence, visibility, and centrality of the African diaspora in spaces from which they were being ideologically erased.

In 1822, enlisting the help of the black Brotherhood of São Benedito, Mariana impeded her now former master Jacinto de Araújo in his intention to have her accompany him on his voyage back to Brazil by claiming her freedom and that of her two daughters. Her home was now in Lisbon, where she wished to continue to live in freedom. Araújo contested her freedom as self-proclaimed with no legal basis and maintained that as his slave, she was to return to Rio with him. Indeed, Araújo extended on his view that Mariana’s geographies consistently undermined Portuguese imperial and racial figurations of space, and as such were illegal. In Araújo’s words, Mariana was always ‘mistreating her masters, in such a way that [Araújo] sent her to the home of a friend of his, together with her two daughters, where she escaped by

²⁵ Hondius, “Access to the Netherlands,” 380.

²⁶ For Catarina, see ANTT, Feitos Findos, Juízo da Índia e Mina, Justificações Ultramarinas, Brasil, mç. 487, no.10; for Engrácia Maria, see ANTT, Feitos Findos, Juízo da Índia e Mina, mç. 7, no. 7, cx. 374.

²⁷ ‘devendo ela regressar ao Rio..., por sorte q[ue] por falta de transporte proporcionado, a não havia ainda remetido ao d[it]o seu destino.’ Feitos Findos, Juízo da Índia e Mina, mç. 31, no. 2, cx. 15, ff. 10-10v.

breaking down doors, taking all her clothes with her in a chest, along with whatever else she could take.²⁸

We can only speculate as to the veracity of this claim. However, for our purposes, Araújo’s claims that Mariana’s personal trajectories and use of space constantly went against the grain of imperial hierarchies of race, power, and slavery suggest that the countervoyage was only one moment in a wider series of geographical and spatial remappings that enslaved Afro-Brazilian women drew in shaping the Old World as their own new world. The countervoyage was at once a space of coercion and agency, confinement and freedom, on which the enactment of service in a fundamentally new context enabled enslaved Afro-Brazilian women to reconfigure the landscape of their servitude. After her countervoyage, Mariana’s performance of service in her master’s home was deemed unacceptable, resulting in a further geographical transition to another domestic context. However, to remain enslaved to a person who had no legal authority over her may likely have been just as unacceptable to Mariana, possibly leading to her leaving this new home without authorisation. While any number of reasons could have persuaded her to ‘escape,’ Mariana was certain of her own freedom, a fact which stemmed directly from her countervoyage.

From at least the seventeenth century, there had been a long, unspoken tradition of slaves arriving in Portugal with masters for the latter’s personal use, as well the importation of inherited slaves of deceased family members overseas, both of which were exempt from import duties.²⁹ To stem the flow of slaves entering Portugal, legislation was passed in 1761 proclaiming that the transportation of slaves to the metropolis was prohibited and that any enslaved persons who arrived in Portugal after that date were to be declared free.³⁰ As Cristina Nogueira da Silva and Keila Grinberg have amply demonstrated, there was no humanitarian impetus or abolitionist sentiment driving this legislation. Imperial Portuguese political and fiscal concerns were the primary motivators, as Pombal’s economic plans firmly rested on the improved profitability of the overseas territories and the taxation of metropolitan wage earners. Slaves were believed a drain on Portugal’s economy as they consumed vital resources but made no direct contributions to the Crown through taxes or services, both of which could be

²⁸ ‘maltratando seos Amos, de maneira q[ue] o Emb[argan]te [Araújo] a mandou para Caza de pessoa de sua Amizade, juntam[en]te com as duas filhas, onde arrombando portas, fugio, levando com sigo a roupa toda de seu uzo em hum baú, com os mais q[ue] pôde levar.’ Ibid, ff.10v-11.

²⁹ Didier Lahon, “Eles vão, eles vêm. Escravos e libertos negros entre Lisboa e o Grão-Pará e Maranhão (séc. XVII-XIX),” *Revista Estudos Amazônicos* 11, no. 1 (2011): 75.

³⁰ Cristina Nogueira da Silva and Keila Grinberg, “Soil Free from Slaves: Slave Law in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Portugal,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, n.3 (2011): 431.

harnessed by revitalising the dwindling population of “free” servants and *criados*. Furthermore, Pombal was convinced that economic growth in the colonies required ever more enslaved Africans to labour in the mines, ranches, plantations and urban environments, which in turn would generate more income for the metropolis.³¹ Thus, enslaved black bodies were supposed to remain confined to the colonies; there was no use for them in Portugal. The 1761 “free soil” law was promulgated principally as a deterrent to slave traffickers and wealthy *reinois* returning to Portugal with their enslaved servants, who stood to lose their human property as soon as they stepped onto Portuguese soil.

While this law was updated with the promulgation of the 1773 “free birth” law, which saw any offspring of enslaved women born after this date legally regarded as free, setting the stage for gradual abolition in Portugal, the implementation of the “free soil” law was haphazard and deeply contested by the enslaved, their owners, and the judiciary.³² In the pursuit of her own geographical agency, Mariana argued in 1822 that both she and her daughters were legally free under the law of 1761, after which date they had certainly arrived in Portugal. However, such a seemingly open and shut case was far from simple. The courts hesitated in making a ruling, taking three years and a direct order from the King to finally force them to confirm the women’s emancipation in 1825.³³ Had Mariana already known of this law before her countervoyage? It is impossible to know. Nevertheless, the volume of manumission requests from enslaved Afro-Brazilians is suggestive that knowledge of this law was circulating throughout the empire and among enslaved Black communities. If so, perhaps we might imagine the moment of her embarkation as one of anticipation rather than trepidation, the moment Mariana realised she was sailing to freedom.

Read as a voyage whose ideological and legal trajectory signified a journey from enslavement to emancipation for Afro-Brazilians post-1761, it is possible to consider the emancipatory countervoyage as a long-distance component of a South Atlantic maritime Underground Railroad. Explored with meticulous detail in the context of the East Coast of the United States, the various essays in the edited collection *Sailing to Freedom* compellingly argue that maritime escape to “free soil” states were vital for enslaved individuals living in port

³¹ Ibid, pp. 432-433.

³² Ibid, p. 434.

³³ ANTT, Feitos Findos, Juízo da Índia e Mina, mç. 12, no. 12, cx. 136.

cities and frequently resulted in successful flight.³⁴ Historians have rightly emphasised the importance of maritime employment aboard seafaring vessels as a predominantly masculine route to freedom in the Atlantic world. W. Jeffrey Bolster illustrates how black African seafaring was central to all Atlantic maritime activity and stretched back to at least the fifteenth century.³⁵ Black “watermen” often earned competitive wages, enjoyed a large degree of privacy and autonomy, and were sometimes able to trade small amounts of goods to generate extra income to supplement their manumission funds.³⁶ Certainly in a Luso-Atlantic context, black sailors could also enter the “free soil” territories of Portugal and claim their emancipation. Many manumission requests from the late eighteenth century were filed by sailors. This was an unintended consequence of the 1761 law, which was now inadvertently emancipating slaves technically belonging to the overseas dominions. Notices, or appendages to the legislation, were swiftly proclaimed, excluding the law’s application to slaves registered on ship lists and who only temporarily entered Portugal before returning to foreign soil. This is clearly indicative of the prevalence of enslaved black watermen crossing the Atlantic towards Europe and the extent to which these sailors seeking legal freedom was considered a serious problem.³⁷

However, the emphasis on enslaved sailors simultaneously works to create a metanarrative around the emancipatory countervoyage as *the* (masculine) maritime route to freedom and obscures the frequency with which women also made these voyages. Mariana’s story illuminates the extent to which the countervoyage could have serious implications for the status, agency, and personal geographies of enslaved Afro-Brazilian women and their families. Thus, the countervoyage opens a window into the ways female captive mobilities could ideologically and spatially create alternate Black geographies that redrew imperial boundaries to assert themselves as agents in the process of emancipation and Black place-making in a metropolitan context.

³⁴ Timothy D. Walker, “Introduction,” in Timothy D. Walker (ed.), *Sailing to Freedom: Maritime Dimensions of the Underground Railroad* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021), p. 5.

³⁵ W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 9-43.

³⁶ David S. Cecelski, “Black Watermen, Fugitives from Slavery, and an Old Woman on the Edge of a Swamp: Maritime Passages to Freedom from Coastal North Carolina,” in Timothy D. Walker, *Sailing to Freedom: Maritime Dimensions of the Underground Railroad* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021), pp. 65-73.

³⁷ Silva and Grinberg, “Soil Free from Slaves,” 435.

Inquisitorial Countervoyages

Not all enslaved women’s countervoyages were a story of accompanying enslavers towards Portugal on a trajectory towards freedom. The Inquisition formed another important dimension of transatlantic slave traffic, carrying enslaved and free(d) accused parties from the Americas to Portugal for incarceration and trial. To date, this maritime aspect of the Inquisitorial process for enslaved defendants has received little direct scholarly attention. Yet traces of the Inquisitorial countervoyage are scattered throughout the archive. An exploration of some of these cases can reveal the dangers of championing the countervoyage as a trajectory towards emancipation in Europe, which may well provide fodder for progressive histories of modernised and Enlightened Europe and further separate historiographical notions of colonial and metropolitan spatial/racial ideologies.

In her richly detailed scholarly biography of Páscoa Vieira, Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile laments how ‘the only trace of Páscoa’s second Atlantic crossing, this time to the northern hemisphere, was the letter from Captain João Fernandes Lima.’³⁸ Over a short paragraph, Castelnau-L'Estoile opines that the journey would have been uncomfortable and quickly moves onto firmer ground by stating that Vieira arrived in Lisbon on 11 November 1700, where she was promptly incarcerated in the Inquisition’s secret prisons. While the paucity of archival documentation indeed makes any further expansion on this second Atlantic crossing extremely difficult, the interstices of slavery, freedom, and transatlantic voyaging in Páscoa Vieira’s biography should give us pause to consider and explore how powerfully transformative the countervoyage was in reshaping notions of coercion, agency, and mobility.

Páscoa Vieira was born enslaved in Massangano, Angola in 1660, where she spent her childhood and married Aleixo, an enslaved Angolan man. The marriage soured quickly, resulting in a tense and confrontational relationship between the couple that led their enslaver to send Páscoa to Bahia, Brazil for re-sale.³⁹ She was bought by her new owner to labour as a domestic servant in Salvador. Here she embarked on a relationship of concubinage with an enslaved man named Pedro, later formalising their union through legitimate Tridentate marriage in 1688.⁴⁰ After living in relative harmony with her second husband for almost six

³⁸ Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Páscoa Vieira diante da Inquisição: Uma escrava entre Angola, Brasil, e Portugal no século XVII*, transl. Lígia Fonseca Ferreira, Regina Salgado Campos (Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo, 2020), p.139.

³⁹ Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Páscoa Vieira diante da Inquisição*, p. 55.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 55-56, 62.

years, during which time she had managed to secure her emancipation, Pedro’s former owner denounced her to the Inquisition as a bigamist, claiming that he had only recently discovered her earlier marriage. The trial was protracted, taking almost ten years to reach a conclusion. After six years of evidence gathering and interrogations, Páscoa Vieira was sent to Lisbon to stand trial for the crime of bigamy.⁴¹

Páscoa Vieira was not the only black enslaved or free(d) woman to be shipped across the Atlantic as a defendant in an ecclesiastical criminal trial. The celebrated Rosa Egipcácia, who was “transformed” from a repeatedly sexually abused enslaved prostitute to become widely revered in eighteenth century Rio de Janeiro as a *beata* and mystic, was also arrested by the Inquisition and brought to Lisbon to be tried.⁴² Three decades earlier, Joana Maria suffered persistent and deeply traumatic rapes, infanticides, and delusions, the latter bringing her to the attention of the Inquisition. When giving testimony in Lisbon, Joana Maria, so traumatised and disorientated by these events, could no longer remember how or where she had come from or even who her parents were. Archival records indicate that she was originally from Pernambuco.⁴³

However, both of Páscoa Vieira’s transatlantic crossings do not fit into either of the categories of slave voyages discussed in this paper, and indeed in the wider historiography: the Middle Passage and the countervoyage. Vieira had made the journey to the Americas as an adult woman who had been born enslaved, and her biographer Castelnau-L’Estoile speculates that her private sale in Bahia makes it likely that she was transported on a small trading vessel with perhaps a few other enslaved persons rather than on a slaver.⁴⁴ It is highly probable that she was spared the unique horrors of the Middle Passage, although her voyage on a merchant vessel would have been extremely uncomfortable, with minimal opportunities for mobility and little food or water. Even more intriguing is her second transatlantic crossing on the *Jesus Maria José*, her “countervoyage” of sorts. Unlike the other women discussed above, Páscoa was a freedwoman on her journey from Bahia to Lisbon; for her, the countervoyage marked a transitional moment from freedom to incarceration. How does Páscoa’s presence upon a

⁴¹ For Páscoa Vieira’s trial records, see ANTT, Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 10026.

⁴² ANTT, Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 2901. For a scholarly biography of Rosa Egipcácia, see Luiz Mott, *Rosa Egipcácia: Uma Santa Africana no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand, 1993).

⁴³ ANTT, Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 10079. João Marques Bacalhau was her enslaver and had served as Ouvidor Geral de Pernambuco and as Juiz Conservador das Causas da Administração da Junta do Comércio Geral em Pernambuco in 1711. See ANTT, Registo Geral de Mercês, Mercês de D. João V, liv. 4, f.541.

⁴⁴ Castelnau-L’Estoile, *Páscoa Vieira diante da Inquisição*, pp. 109, 112.

countervoyaging vessel deepen our understanding of the transformative geographical, spatial, and ideological nature of this trajectory for female captive mobilities in the Luso-Atlantic world? To answer this, we must first examine the contours of Portugal’s Afro-Brazilian population to discern the age, sex and legal status groups on board the countervoyage, which then enables us to sketch out an initial reconstruction of the countervoyage as space and place.

Didier Lahon has rightly argued that the importance of Black slavery and persons of African descent in Portuguese society has been hugely overlooked, while the small amount of academic interest in this area focuses on the early modern period, for which workable estimates are now available.⁴⁵ From the earliest days of Portuguese imperial expansion in the fifteenth century, a constant stream of enslaved Africans was forcibly being transported to Europe. Recent historians estimate that 300,000-350,000 sub-Saharan Africans were displaced to the Iberian Peninsula between 1440 and 1640, a figure almost equal to that of enslaved Africans transported to the Spanish Americas during the same period.⁴⁶ By the early sixteenth century, around 10% of Portugal’s population was black African, a percentage that fluctuates only slightly until the nineteenth century. Prior to the 1700s, research suggests that almost half of all black African slaves shipped from Arguin to Lisbon were women aged 19-35 (46%), while a just over a fifth (21%) were under-18s.⁴⁷ Thus, until the eighteenth century, two-thirds of Portugal’s black population were women and children.

Archival evidence indicates that enslaved Afro-Brazilian women were also living in Lisbon from at least 1621, which suggests that these population estimates, based on slave trade records from West Africa, could feasibly be higher if we include enslaved Afro-Brazilians living in Portugal.⁴⁸ Indeed, Lahon contends that until the introduction of the “free soil” law of 1761, there was a consistent increase of slave imports to Lisbon, with as many as 400,000 enslaved persons sent there by that date.⁴⁹ Portuguese maritime trading patterns in the Atlantic dictated a triangular trade that primarily traversed the following route: Lisbon – West Africa – Brazil – Lisbon, making short stops to reprovision the vessel along the way. The return leg of these journeys – the countervoyage – annually carried enslaved Africans and Afro-Brazilians

⁴⁵ Lahon, “Eles vão, eles vêm,” 72-74.

⁴⁶ Mendes, “Africanas escravas au Portugal,” 45, 48.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁸ Two Afro-Brazilian women, coincidentally both named Grácia, started marriage proceedings in 1621 supplying information that would be used in the publication of the banns. ANTT, Câmara Eclesiástica de Lisboa, Sumários Matrimoniais, mç. 567, proc. no.s 80 e 108.

⁴⁹ Lahon, “Eles vão, eles vêm,” 74.

to Portugal. In 1720 alone, 104 slaves had arrived in Lisbon from Bahia, while 83 had entered the city from Pernambuco.⁵⁰

Import tax records from Funchal in Madeira over the eighteenth century corroborate the thesis that enslaved Afro-Brazilians annually entered Portugal. Part of a North Atlantic archipelago off the coast of Portugal, the island of Madeira was a crucial waypoint on the countervoyage to Portugal that enabled ships returning from Brazil to replenish their stocks of food, water, and tools and served as an export destination for leather, cotton, honey, sugar, and other commodities from the Americas. While there are significant gaps, import tax ledgers from 1718-20, 1723, 1742-44, 1752-54, 1758, 1761-62, and 1762-64 indicate that duties were levied for the importation of enslaved Afro-Brazilians into Madeira from ships arriving from Brazil.⁵¹ Crucially, these records point to the lax implementation of the 1761 “free soil” law, as duties were paid for slaves entering Funchal for a few years after that date. It is only from 1772 onwards that duties for the importation of enslaved Afro-Brazilians are absent from the ledgers.⁵² This suggests that by the 1770s, the 1761 law was becoming more firmly policed and enslaved Africans either did not disembark the ship or were illegally smuggled into the island to circumvent the order.⁵³ Nevertheless, these ledgers are a vital source for any analysis of the countervoyage, as they explicitly detail a minimum number of slaves travelling from Brazil to Portugal in these years. They are absolute minimums as the possibility remains that these ships landed in Funchal to prepare for a final landing in Lisbon or Porto and duties for slaves disembarking in mainland Portugal were not paid.

Voyaging While Female: Black Geographies on the Countervoyage

As we might expect, the percentages of enslaved adult males, females, boys and girls fluctuate throughout these records. Adult men were more common on the countervoyage than young boys. Female captives in general comprised between one-quarter and two-thirds of entrants in Funchal, while young girls regularly outnumbered adult women by small amounts. This figure is particularly striking when considered against the backdrop of colonial Brazilian enslaved populations, which tended to have a visibly larger male majority. Proportionally speaking, then, this estimate suggests that colonial Brazilian female captives were more likely to undertake the Luso-Atlantic countervoyage than their male counterparts, although more

⁵⁰ Figures calculated from the *Gazeta de Lisboa* of 1720. Cited in *ibid*, 75.

⁵¹ ANTT, Provedoria e Junta da Real Fazenda do Funchal, livros 81, 135, 136, 137, 138, e 271.

⁵² ANTT, Provedoria e Junta da Real Fazenda do Funchal, livro 139.

⁵³ ANTT, Feitos Findos, Juízo da Índia e Mina, mc. 12, no. 12, cx. 136.

research is necessary to confirm this finding. Nevertheless, across all records there is a large and consistent presence of young children (*moleques pequenos/moleguas pequenas*) on the countervoyage, arriving in Portugal as the enslaved property of captains, crew members, or on behalf of their new owners. This constant stream of enslaved Afro-Brazilian children is borne out in archival fragments and is particularly visible in the traces of black women living in Portugal. Marcelina Maria, who accompanied her enslaver and sexual abuser, was brought to Lisbon at a very young age and had spent almost her entire life in the capital.⁵⁴ The sisters Isabel Maria da Conceição and Úrsula das Virgens were sent from Salvador da Bahia on the countervoyage as children to live with their enslaver’s relatives and contended that they had lived as free(d) women.⁵⁵ Even as early as the 1620s, an Afro-Brazilian woman named Grácia explained that she had arrived in Portugal from Brazil as a girl.⁵⁶ This evidence is suggestive of a marked presence of enslaved young girls as well as adult women on the countervoyage.

Circling back to Páscoa Vieira, we can now see that it was likely she was not the only black female aboard the *Jesus Maria José* on her countervoyage to Lisbon. Her presence as a freed African black woman sailing alongside enslaved African and Afro-Brazilian men, women, and children suggests a wider African diasporic significance of the Luso-Atlantic countervoyage. In this context, we might read the countervoyage as a transformative journey through which Africans and their colonial descendants were drawn together in the figurative and physical space between colony and metropolis. The transportation of enslaved and free(d) men, women, and children together on a single voyage marks an important contrast to the Middle Passage, bringing up new and crucial questions concerning the significance maritime captive mobilities had for black geographies, Atlantic world cartographies, and the wider African diaspora.

To what extent was the countervoyage fundamentally different from the Middle Passage? I have explored above some of the more obvious ways in which it departed from trajectories of the Middle Passage, principally in that the countervoyage moved eastwards from the Americas to Europe and that the primary purpose was not economic (to deliver large numbers of enslaved labourers to the colonies) but personal or judicial. We know that men, women, and children were all present on the countervoyage, as on the Middle Passage, but early research indicates that female captives of all ages were more likely to sail on the countervoyage. But what did a

⁵⁴ ANTT, Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 631.

⁵⁵ ANTT, Feitos Findos, Juízo da Índia e Mina, Justificações Ultramarinas, Brasil, mç. 208, no. 12.

⁵⁶ ANTT, Câmara Eclesiástica de Lisboa, Sumários Matrimoniais, mç. 567, proc. No.80.

countervoyage look or feel like? Much recent research has made huge strides in piecing together the horrors and despair of the Middle Passage from the perspective of its captives. Disease, death, famine, solidarity and resistance on board slaving vessels have been meticulously detailed and analysed by a range of scholars. Yet there is no such body of literature for the countervoyage. What follows is a first, and short, attempt to illustrate what the countervoyage may have been like for enslaved and free(d) women. Aspects of this image of the countervoyage were likely part and parcel of maritime voyages more broadly, and thus will draw heavily on secondary literature.

Let us begin with the vessel itself. As the countervoyage was often the return leg of a triangular trading route, logically the pattern of vessels would follow that of those used for slaving from the West African coasts to the Americas. Ships of all sizes made the countervoyage, from the huge *galeras* to the smaller *curvetas* or sloops. Funchal’s customs ledgers indicate that the majority of ships arriving from Brazil to Europe were *curvetas* in the eighteenth century, and so suggestive of a smaller hold and cargo. The volume of cargo they carried depended largely on the size of the vessel, but other factors such as weather, seasons, financial concerns, or quality of the commodities played important roles in determining if a countervoyage set sail at full capacity. Regardless of capacity, the crucial distinction between the Middle Passage and the countervoyage was the number of captive commodities. The *raison d’être* of a slaving voyage from West Africa was to deliver enslaved labour to the Americas and thus resulted in hundreds of African men, women, and children being packed tightly into the hold for transportation as chattel. Captives on a countervoyage would have been far fewer. Funchal’s records show duties paid for between three and twelve slaves per vessel, strongly indicating that the countervoyage was a long and lonely journey for the captives on board. Theoretically speaking, the return leg of the slaver’s maritime route – the countervoyage – was to transport non-human cargo to Europe, commodities such as sugar, coffee, and tobacco with a high re-sale value on the global market. In reality, these journeys carried human, animal, and inanimate objects in varying amounts, but we can be confident that captives comprised only a small percentage of the cargo. On a slave voyage, food was always in scarce supply and whatever was on board was for consumption; on the countervoyage, perishables were in abundance and almost entirely for commercialisation. Captives were surrounded by the sugar, honey, coffee, and tropical fruits that furnished the dining tables of Europe’s elite, all of which would most certainly have been kept under strict surveillance.

Ships setting sail from Brazil and docking in Madeira regularly carried large amounts of leather and cotton, and often smaller amounts of sugar, honey, and *aguardente*. It is likely that captives were held separately from the trade commodities, although both will have been housed below decks. As profits from the countervoyage correlated with the volume of goods transported, captains sought to fill their vessels as much as possible before setting sail, leaving very little room for captives to move. The temporary wooden decks fitted to transport Africans on the Middle Passage would have been removed for the return leg to accommodate trade goods. The geography of the vessel had now transformed from a slaver to a merchant ship, yet for much of its captive cargo on both legs, the space in which they were held was restricted and restrictive. Castelnau-L'Estoile suggests that Páscoa Vieira may have slept on a hammock below decks as the lower-ranking sailors did, presumably by virtue of her free(d) status and the direct order of the Inquisition to transport her, which the captain could not refuse.⁵⁷ It is entirely possible that free(d) passengers slept separately from the captives, on hammocks rather than on the straw mats laid on the floor, as was the custom on many Portuguese slavers.⁵⁸

However, I suggest that for free(d) and captive females on the countervoyage, any spatial distinction between the enslaved and free(d) was likely much more blurred. On the Middle Passage, enslaved women were regularly forced onto the upper decks and repeatedly raped by crew members to satisfy their sexual appetites. There is no reason to suppose that black women, both enslaved and free(d), did not face the same fate on the countervoyage. Marlene Nourbese Philip describes how black women became the very mechanics of New World slavery through ‘the space between the legs,’ and shows “how the logic of visualization, or the seeable black female body, naturalizes sexual differences” yet also “disrupts normalized gender categories... [by putting] forth a complicated bodily geography.”⁵⁹ I would extend this further to suggest that black women’s ‘space between the legs’ formed a crucial component to the mechanics of slavery on the countervoyage, itself a journey across “the space between” the Old and New World. Indeed, black captive and free(d) women on these voyages would have been even more ‘seeable’ due to the small numbers of enslaved persons on board. Thus, black women’s constant presence on the upper decks likely served to increase the risk of rape to a near certainty. The upper decks, the domain of white labour, power, and privilege, was for black women also the site of sexual abuse and extreme violence, a space in which their

⁵⁷ Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Páscoa Vieira diante da Inquisição*, p. 140.

⁵⁸ Linda A. Newson and Susie Minchin, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p.105.

⁵⁹ McKitterick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. 80.

commodification reached its nadir as their bodies were violated to such a degree as to erase any vestige of personhood.

However, black women’s own usage of the upper decks on the countervoyage would have reinscribed new meanings onto the site of the upper deck that moved beyond sexual and gender categories. On the Middle Passage, African captive women were regularly made to cook meals for the crew and the enslaved using cheap, highly-calorific, and nutritionally-poor foodstuffs. Aside from the captain, other top-ranking officers, and certain elite passengers, food provision was basic for all travelling on the countervoyage. It is highly likely that enslaved women brought along to serve passengers on their voyage, such as Mariana, would have been heavily involved in exhausting domestic duties such as meal preparation, washing, cleaning, and the care of children, and would have worked alongside the most junior crew members. They would have had a much greater degree of mobility on the ship, spending much of their time on the upper decks. Free(d) female passengers would not have been kept in the hold, although constant vigilance over their persons was certainly possible, and as free women, they would have had access to the upper decks too. In this regard, the reshaping of the upper deck as a space marked out by captive and free(d) women for their own use and purposes points to a black female positionality on the countervoyage that offered women moments of connection, conversation, and solidarity.

Female captives’ presence and spatialisation of the vessel on the countervoyage created tense and conflicted notions of Atlantic slavery in terms of black geographies, coercion, and agency. As mentioned above, the countervoyage carried only very small numbers of captives on any one vessel, putting paid to any opportunities for freedom by means of violent uprising, so feared by the outnumbered crews of slaving voyages. However, solidarity does not necessarily signify physical resistance. The black female presence on, and use of, the upper deck remapped this sexually violent space as a site for sharing knowledge, stories, anxieties, fears, and hopes across African and Afro-Brazilian socio-cultural spheres. Drawing on African and Afro-Brazilian religious and cultural mappings of the (meta)physical world, I suggest that black female positionality on the countervoyage could be a site through which the Atlantic Ocean itself became reconfigured along black geographic axes. The countervoyage, then, exposes both ‘the space between the legs,’ and ‘the space between’ the Old and New Worlds, between religions, cultures, geographies, and ideologies. Black women fundamentally shape both spaces, and as such are crucial to any theoretical conceptualisation of the countervoyage. The positionality of black women on the countervoyage, enslaved and free, African and Afro-

Brazilian, is the opportunity, the moment, in which ‘the space between’ can give birth to a new Black diasporic geography of the Atlantic world.

Towards the “Counter-Voyage”

Countervoyages took several forms, just as the Middle Passage did, charting their way through different maritime routes and undertaken by enslaved men and women from all over the Americas. Interestingly, captive migrations from the Americas to Europe were sometimes voyages that sailed towards freedom, as Afro-Brazilian and French Caribbean slaves quickly learnt in the eighteenth century, yet they were also journeys that could carry emancipated Africans to a state of unfreedom. Most importantly, countervoyages were emblematic of a black trans-Atlantic diasporic mobility, uniting Africans and their colonial descendants on a metaphysical journey that stretched the limits of imperial binary logic of the Old/New World to complicate the very meaning of transatlantic slavery.

Building on P. C. Emmer’s analytical distinction between the first and second Atlantic systems of slavery, Smallwood has argued that the second Atlantic system, dominated by the British and Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ‘was an Atlantic arena dominated by Europeans who could not comfortably bear the idea of blacks moving freely between African and American settings. Put differently, it did not easily accommodate African subjectivity outside the narrow and homogenous category of racialized slavery.’⁶⁰ Here I seek to extend on Smallwood’s argument by reframing it in the context of the countervoyage. Free(d) and enslaved Africans and their colonial descendants came together on the countervoyage, a journey on which the boundaries between slavery and freedom were simultaneously deepened and suspended. Thus, the Atlantic Ocean was not simply a space conquered by European empires, geopolitically spatialised along axes of racialised logic that confined and funnelled Black bodies into perpetual slavery according to Western European imperial ideologies. Instead, I argue that on the countervoyage the Atlantic became a contested maritime arena in which imperial cartographies were redrawn, rupturing European distinctions between slavery and freedom, colonial and metropolitan, Black places and white spaces. I

⁶⁰ Stephanie E. Smallwood, “African Guardians, European Slave Ships and the Changing Dynamics of Power in the Early Modern Atlantic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no.4 (2007): 708. For more on the distinctions between the first and second Atlantic systems, see P. C. Emmer, “The Dutch and the Making of the Second Atlantic System,” in Barbara L. Solow (ed.) *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 75-96.

suggest that the countervoyage is precisely a counter-fact disavowed by the archive due to its defiance of imperial European notions of racial-geographical space, in which the Atlantic Ocean played a defining and central role. Metanarratives of transatlantic slavery continue to rest on ideological distinctions that wrestle agency from black captives to determine their mobility and diasporic activities within pre-defined geographical (colonial) spaces. A transatlantic slave voyage that moves *towards* Europe, that unifies Africans and Afro-Brazilians, enslaved and free(d) men, women, and children in a single space, runs counter to our accepted version of African diasporic history and offers a different lens through we can appreciate how black geographies redrew the Atlantic world. What is at stake here is the re-spatialisation of what we consider to be “the Atlantic world,” not only in terms of its material geography, but also in the sense of its symbolic and narrative meaning for the history of the African diaspora.

To conceive of the “counter-voyage” as a “counter-passage,” a purely inverted Middle Passage or its exact opposite, however, is an oversimplification that has no basis in historical reality nor significant applicability as analytical concept. Exploring the significance of this geographical, symbolic, and imagined trajectory that brings colonial bodies into metropolitan spaces can enable us to avoid the trap of considering the countervoyage as a specific, measurable event or time-space phenomenon. If we first build the countervoyage as a constellation of narratives and African-American knowledges that challenges epistemologies of the slave trade, that envisions the countervoyage as an experience, a moment, a “counter-fact” that the archive seeks to bury as “counter” to the metahistorical teleology, we can begin to assemble the “counter-voyage” as a conceptual tool to explore how black geographies and spatialities are constructed beyond the constraints of traditional renderings of transatlantic slavery through the Middle Passage.