Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive*.

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Dispossessed Lives begins with an introduction followed by five chapters with titles bearing the names of women—black and white, enslaved and free. In the epilogue Marisa Fuentes explains that she went to Barbados eager to conduct research and write about “the ways enslaved women labored, built communities, and experienced the confinements of urban life.” Her encounter with the archives was a major disappointment, however, because she was confronted with the “paucity of material about enslaved women, the complete absence of material by enslaved women, and the intensity of archival and physical violence on enslaved women.” What could she do with mere “archival mention, fragment or image?” How could she bring these women out of anonymity while also helping to shift “the discipline of history into a more transparent and reflexive frame?” (p. 144 for these four quotations). Her answer was to build the fragments into a rigorous methodical approach that challenges the biases of traditional archival sources and the ways in which they have shaped our thinking, considering that these sources were “produced in a system of violence against racialized and gendered subjects” (p. 123). The central issue Fuentes wrestled with was the colonial authority that shaped archival entries. What readers end up with is a history of slavery that exposes the cruelty unleashed upon the bodies of enslaved women in Bridgetown—a dimension of urban slavery hitherto neglected.

Seeking “to subvert the archival discourse that filters the past only through white (male and female) voices” (p. 15), Fuentes carefully scrutinizes the archival fragments and draws on additional sources (mostly interdisciplinary) to give enslaved women their own voices. Chapter 1 follows Jane—a fugitive whom the *Barbados Mercury* described in 1789 as having a fire brand on one of her breasts and a knife wound in her neck—through the streets of Bridgetown as she made her escape. Fuentes uses Jane’s probable path to explore the geography, history, and pulse of Bridgetown: the careenage along which Jane may have passed, the newly-arriving Africans in port, the execution sites she may have seen, the Cheapside market where she may have sought refuge from women hucksters, and the Public Cage where slaves were confined.

Chapter 4 focuses on Molly, executed by hanging in 1768 for allegedly attempting to poison John Denny, a member of the Barbados Council. Satisfied that Molly met a fitting end, Governor William Perry was outraged at the organized and spirited memorialization of what he called “this Wrench” by the enslaved community at her burial. With no regard for (or perhaps knowledge

of) African burial rituals, the governor considered their actions unlawful and an insult to Denny. Molly's saga provides fertile grounds for Fuentes to write about the hazards of slavery in Bridgetown where Molly may have been hired out to Denny, and was possibly abused and exploited as many were. Her story debunks the view that domestic labor in urban households afforded enslaved women "respite from the violence of sugar production on the plantations" (p. 111). Criminalization of the enslaved, arbitrary executions, compensation for executed slaves, changes in the slave codes, and the drumming, dancing and singing that formed part of nighttime slave burial rituals help us to understand Molly's world.

Chapter 5 tells the story of Venus, whose piercing screams could be heard from a considerable distance as she lay chained to the floor, bleeding and near death in her owner's house in Bridgetown around 1780, after he administered three separate beatings of 39 lashes, which the law allowed. Frequent occurrences of such torture, as well as "sexualized punishments," which provide evidence of slave women's encounter with power, were symptomatic of the violence of urban slavery.

The exercise of power was not the purview of white men alone. Indeed, Fuentes does not let Rachel Pringle Polgreen—the celebrated mixed-race former slave woman turned shrewd, wealthy entrepreneur in eighteenth-century Barbados—off the hook. Instead, she challenges us to dig deeper into Polgreen's historical narrative, showing how she used her power to unleash violence on the enslaved women she owned. In one instance, she used the heel of her shoe to administer a vicious beating to one of her slave women whose earnings from prostituting herself aboard a ship on Polgreen's orders, she deemed insufficient. Were it not for the intervention of two military officers, the woman would likely have died.

Dispossessed Lives—provocative, even arrogant in some respects—is a work of great historical merit despite the lack of empirical data. Narrating from "silence" is of course not new; some scholars (including this reviewer) have done so. What is new is the methodology that Fuentes employs—inventive, imaginative, and thought-provoking. The book is the creation of a first-rate mind.

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