



# Positioning enslaved persons in 19th century Barbados fugitive slave advertisements



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## Introduction

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade occurred through the 15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, displacing over 12 million Africans (Walvin 2014). While myriad slavery-based economies were united by this shared history of displacement, modes of reinforcing enslavement differed considerably across enslavement contexts, therein impacting modes of governance and racialization (Yelvington 2004; Madrigal 2006). **This preliminary study analyzed the social positioning of enslaved persons following the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807, specifically the enslaved in Barbados who chose to resist their status through escape.**

## Results

Table 1. Highest frequency codes in the sample.

Code	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage (valid)
Racial designator	204	68.00	68.92
Harboring	199	66.33	67.23
Features	190	63.33	64.19
Man	161	53.67	54.39
Build	125	41.67	42.23
Woman	122	40.67	41.22
Time away	103	34.33	34.80
Skin color	101	33.67	34.12
Assimilation	88	29.33	29.73
Skills	63	21.00	21.28
Birthplace	56	18.67	18.92
Language comment	37	12.33	12.50
Employment	34	11.33	11.49
Benevolence	32	10.67	10.81
Deception	32	10.67	10.81
DOCUMENTS with code(s)	296	98.67	100.00
DOCUMENTS without code(s)	4	1.33	-
ANALYZED DOCUMENTS	300	100.00	-

## Materials and Methods

- **Sample:** 343 advertisement transcriptions collected from the *Barbados Mercury*, and *Bridgetown Gazette* newspaper, spanning 1807-1812
- Content analysis in MAXQDA
- Deductive and inductive coding approach
  - A priori codebook developed, informed by theoretical frameworks of racialization (e.g., Mills 2014; Wade 2017)
  - Codebook tested on subset of sample, then applied to full dataset
  - Codes derived from data incorporated into codebook
- Theme identification
  - Most prevalent codes identified (Table 1)
  - Key Word in Context (KWIC) analyses, code frequencies, and code relation browsers

## Identified Themes

### Race and Color Fungibility

- 'Blackness' tied to Barbadian-ness
- 'Negro' connoted way of being for enslaved status
- 'Mulatto' did not connote mode of being; similar in structure to 'White' persons

### An Act

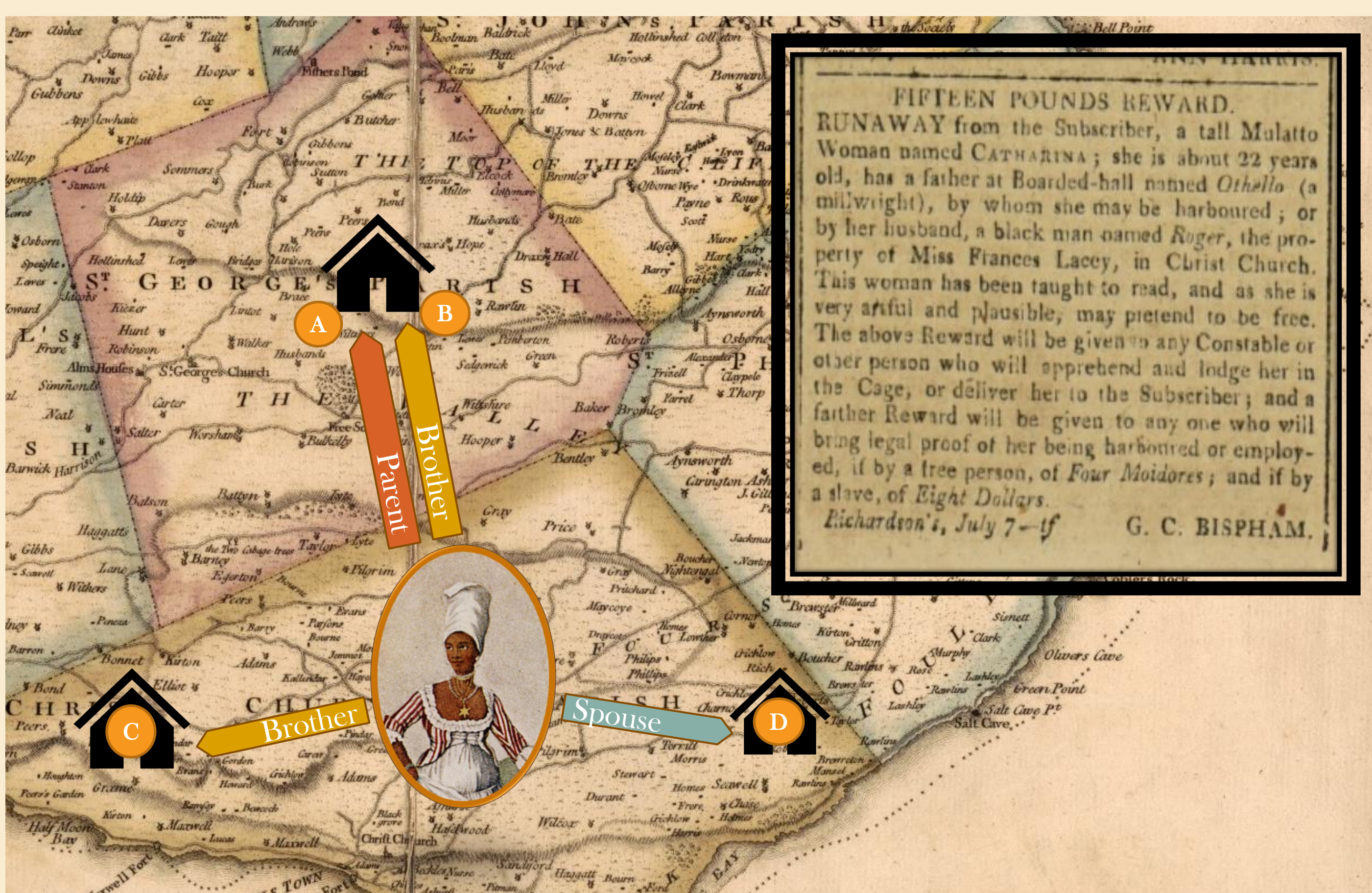
- Controlled Acts: Strategic performances to conceal enslaved status
- Uncontrolled Acts: Immutable characteristics that could aid/hinder escape

### Seeking the Familiar

- Tight networks of relatives and acquaintances (see Fig. 1)
- Network members mostly in same or bordering parish

## Discussion/Conclusions

- Staying hidden a careful balance of recognizing features beyond their control (e.g., language, ability to "pass") and adapting them to controlled performances (e.g., dressing as sailor, acting as hairdresser)
- 'Blackness' not highly associated with birthplace or unfamiliarity with island
- 'Negro' referent for enslaved persons' cultural experience (e.g., Negro freckles, Negro houses)
- Social connections of runaways spread across plantations, but tight geographically



**Figure 1.** The social connections of one runaway enslaved woman, Catharina, with her image approximated from historical painting by Agostino Brunias; (A) Father, Othello, is a millwright, and (B) brother, William Green, are both at Boarded-hall plantation in St. George; (C) Brother, John Leary, is a carpenter at Retreat Plantation in Christ Church; (D) Spouse, Roger, at Frances Lacey's property.

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