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29.	Aluma	Toby.	D.	D.	Socco
30.	Tortoise	Sea	D.	D.	Luambo.
31.	Cabina.	Nathan	D.	D.	D.
32.	Hampton	Nehemia Elizabeth Mann	D.	D.	D.
33.	Monday	Marsi.	D.	D.	D.
34.	Thunder.	Caleb.	D.	D.	D.
35.	Jarnie		D.	D.	D.
36.	Samuel		D.	D.	Ciole
37.	Hunter	Barnabas	D.	D.	
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Archival Interruptions

Constructing Religion and
Criminalizing Obeah in
Eighteenth-Century Jamaica

Katharine Gerbner

Archival Irruptions



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Archival Irruptions

*Constructing Religion and Criminalizing
Obeah in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica*

KATHARINE GERBNER

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Duke University Press Durham and London 2025

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For my parents, Anne and John Gerbner

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MAP FM.1. Map of the Atlantic World. Drawn by Bill Nelson for *Archival Irruptions*.

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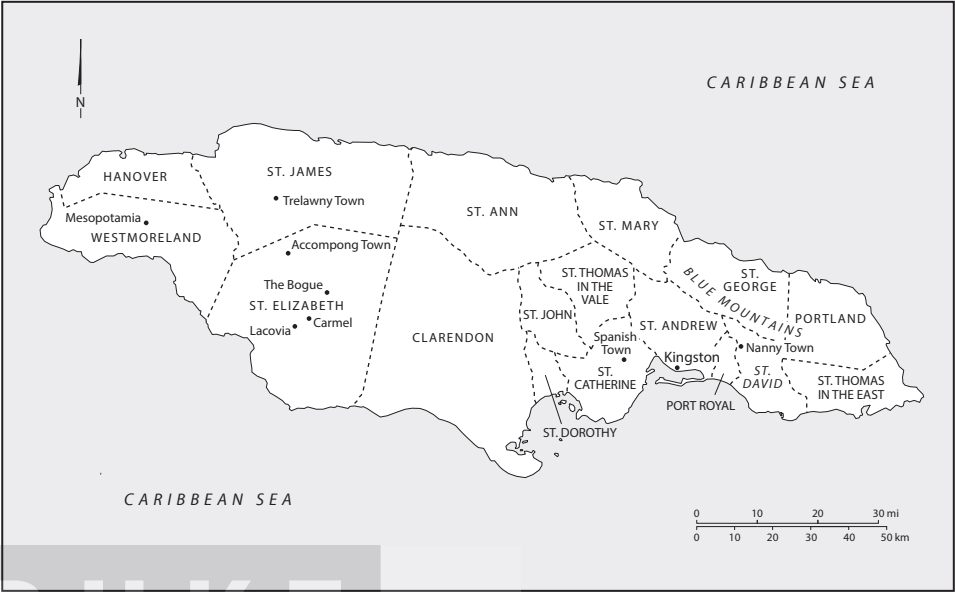


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MAP FM.2. Map of the Caribbean. Drawn by Bill Nelson for *Archival Irruptions*.



MAP FM.3. Map of Jamaica. Drawn by Bill Nelson for *Archival Irruptions*.

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MAP FM.4. Map of western Jamaica. Drawn by Bill Nelson for *Archival Irruptions*.

Introduction

In December 1760, Obeah became a crime. Obeah, an Afro-Caribbean word that defies definition, has been called an Africana religion, a science, a healing practice, a form of black magic—and much more. While the meaning of Obeah remains a topic of debate, colonial lawmakers defined—and criminalized—Obeah as a “wicked Art” in the wake of Tacky’s Revolt, the largest uprising of enslaved people in the eighteenth-century British Empire. The rebellion brought together Africans of diverse origins who waged a months-long attack on their enslavers. In response, lawmakers passed “The Act to Remedy the Evils arising from irregular Assemblies of Slaves,” which was intended to prevent future uprisings. It was the first law to name Obeah, which was associated with “the Devil and other evil spirits.”¹ The criminalization of Obeah has had long-lasting effects, and the practice remains a crime today in Jamaica.

Five years before Tacky’s Revolt, Obeah entered the archives of slavery in very different terms. On March 17, 1755, a German Moravian missionary named

Zacharias George Caries wrote a letter to Johannes Watteville, a Moravian church leader. In his letter, Caries wrote, “they call me Obea[h], which supposedly means a Seer, or one who knows things that will happen in the future.”² Caries’s letter, which now sits in the Unitätsarchiv der Evangelischen Brüder-Unität in Herrnhut, Germany, is one of just a handful of archival references to Obeah before the practice was criminalized in 1760. Of those, it is the only source to describe Obeah outside the conceptual frameworks of witchcraft, superstition, or conjuring. Instead, it recounts how Afro-Jamaicans used the term. Most strikingly, it suggests that Obeah was not only an Afro-Caribbean practice: It was also the framework that Afro-Jamaicans used to interpret Moravian Christianity.

Archival Irruptions examines the chasm between Caries’s description of Obeah as a prophetic tradition in 1755 and its criminalization in 1760. Chronologically, it uses these two events as bookends for a microhistorical study about the formation of religion as a category—a category that developed in the crucible of colonialism, missionization, and slavery. While missionaries policed the boundaries of Christianity, slave-owning legislators waged war on Africana sources of power. In their legal codes, they criminalized religio-political practices like Obeah and denigrated them as superstitious, antimodern, and evil. Their attacks were effective, and the oppression of Africana traditions such as Obeah has been formative for the modern category of religion.³

The state-sanctioned repression of Africana religions has made it difficult for scholars to write about the traditions that were targeted for criminalization, particularly during the colonial period. I address this problem by reading the archive for “irruptions,” which I define as disruptions in the narrative field of an archival producer. There are many different types of irruptions, and I argue that Caries’s reference to Obeah was an Africana irruption that creates an opportunity to write an alternative narration about Obeah in the Atlantic World.

The idea of an archival irruption—the methodological concept that underpins this book—builds on scholarship that interrogates the archive, especially in critical archival studies, Africana religious studies, and Native American and Indigenous studies.⁴ I take inspiration from Lisa Brooks’s metaphorical description of the “narrative field” of colonial archives, in which indigenous “weeds” can unsettle colonial narratives in unexpected ways.⁵ I use the term *irruption* because it conveys a sense of rupture in the archive. *To irrupt* means to “to break into,” often suddenly, while the noun *irruption* refers to the “act of bursting or breaking in.”⁶ By “bursting” into the narrative field of colonial and missionary archives, irruptions can be violent, but they also create narrative possibilities. I draw on

both senses of the word in this book. Some irruptions I examine refer to unsettling themes and violent acts. Others, like Caries's reference to Obeah, offer a glimpse into a way of knowing that has been otherwise "silenced."

The Moravian archives from eighteenth-century Jamaica are an especially rich source of archival irruptions, but they have largely been ignored because they were written in *Kurrent*, an archaic form of handwritten German that requires specialized training to decipher.⁷ Through a microhistory of the Moravian mission, alongside an analysis of British colonial and legal sources, I explore a series of irruptions in the archives. In doing so, I offer strategies for reading European archives through an Africana lens. While the current study focuses on Africana irruptions, the methods outlined here are applicable to studies of all colonial and missionary archives, and they can be utilized fruitfully alongside other archival strategies, such as reading "against the grain," reading "along the bias grain," or examining the "silences" in the archive.⁸

Reading for irruptions reveals a new story about Obeah, Christianity, and criminalization. For the Afro-Jamaicans who joined the Moravian church in the mid-1750s, there was initially a "space of correlation" between Obeah and Christianity.⁹ This space of correlation was short-lived: in 1759, only four years after his arrival, Zacharias George Caries was expelled from the Jamaican mission, and the Moravian missionaries who replaced him eschewed any overlap between Obeah and Christianity. One story that this book tells is how the categories of Obeah and Christianity became incompatible through the twin processes of policing (chapter 5) and criminalization (chapter 6). This was not inevitable, and *Archival Irruptions* insists that we must reckon with the legacies of slavery to understand how and why some religious practices have been excluded from the lexicon of religion and criminalized.

The boundaries of religion have always been—and continue to be—policed, both within religious congregations and by colonial and postcolonial states. Still, it is not enough to say that Obeah belongs in the protected legal category of religion. Obeah was—and is—much more than that. While it is not possible to recover the full epistemic meaning of Obeah for its adherents in the eighteenth century, reading for Africana irruptions suggests that Obeah was a prophetic practice tied to healing modalities and death rites, and—crucially—formed a core component of what I call a *religio-nation*, a framework I describe at length in chapter 2. The term *religio-nation* is intended to draw attention to the fact that religious power was—and is—always political, and that political power is built on religious and sacred authority. This is true both for the Afro-Caribbean tradition of Obeah and for the British colonial state, which drew on

notions of the sacred in its performance of lawmaking and policing (chapter 6). In criminalizing Obeah, Euro-Jamaican lawmakers sought to eradicate Obeah because it was a source of Africana religio-political power that threatened slavery and colonialism.

Re/formations

The examination of terms and categories is central to the methodology in this book. By reading for irruptions, we can see how modern categories were being re/formed under colonialism and slavery. I use the term *re/formations* to describe this process because it has multiple semantic fields of reference. When capitalized and written without a slash, the most common adjective to join *Reformation* is *Protestant*. One objective of *Archival Irruptions* is to center Africana theologies and Caribbean history within the long Reformation, including the transatlantic Protestant movements that followed it, such as the Great Awakening. The Moravian Church, which was founded in 1727 in eastern Germany, has played a central role in historical narratives about the transatlantic Great Awakening.¹⁰ Beginning in the 1730s, the Moravian Church became a global missionary church, and Moravian missionaries focused their evangelism on non-Europeans.¹¹ George Whitefield and John Wesley, key figures in the Great Awakening, had close ties with the Moravian Church, and Moravians pioneered key revivalist strategies that were later replicated by the Methodist Church and many other Protestant denominations.¹² While the dominant story of the Great Awakening regarding Africans and their descendants has focused on the rise of Black Protestantism, *Archival Irruptions* tells a different kind of story, one that shows how Africana epistemologies are crucial for understanding the evolving meaning of Protestantism in the Atlantic world.¹³

Within the context of the African diaspora, the word *reformation* (not capitalized) takes on different contours, recalling classic debates about African cultures, societies, and religions as they moved across the Atlantic. Scholars have long debated how to theorize the consequences of enslavement and the Middle Passage on the myriad religious traditions of Africa, including Islam and Christianity. The core debate animating the field has pitted the survival and resilience of African religious traditions (retentions) against the creative development and adaptation of new religious and cultural traditions (creolization).¹⁴ More recently, scholars have offered new metaphors and interpretive lenses to describe and analyze Black Atlantic histories, cultures, and religions through terms such as *re/membrance*, *religio-racial*, *dialogue*, *Africana nations*, or *assemblage*—to name just a few.¹⁵ *Archival Irruptions* enters this conversation through a micro-

history of one Afro-Moravian community in Jamaica. In this context, the term *reformation* underlines that religious traditions, whether European or African, were always in formation. I do this by arguing that the Moravian congregation in Jamaica should be understood as an Africana religio-nation, a concept I describe in chapter 2.

Finally, the idea of *re/formations* (lowercase, with a slash) connects with scholarship on the development of modern categories. *Archival Irruptions* argues that ideas about religion, crime, nation, and race were being formulated from the top down and the bottom up. Accordingly, this study is focused on the interplay between intimate relationships and legal codes, healing practices and state-sanctioned repression, parental caretaking and rebellion, sacred histories and sexual violence, the memory of ancestors, and missionary policies. It argues that we cannot understand the history of Christianity, the construction of crime, or the categories of religion and race without examining both intimate encounters and colonial statecraft within the context of slavery.

Re/formations of Religion

Historians of religion have long recognized that the modern category of religion developed, in part, out of the dynamics of imperialism.¹⁶ *Archival Irruptions* places the construction of religion within the history of eighteenth-century Atlantic slavery and decenters colonial perspectives on religion by examining Africana epistemologies. I argue that scholars must examine the formation of religion under colonial slavery by reading for irruptions and analyzing the development of taxonomies. My method has three components: First, I read colonial and missionary archives for Africana irruptions to offer, in this case, an epistemological framework of Obeah before it was criminalized and excluded from the category of religion. Second, I attend to the ways that Europeans described the religio-political practices of others using freighted terms such as *fetish*, *superstition*, and *witchcraft*. Third, I examine the terms that scholars have used over the past century to denote practices that could fall under the category of “religious” or “religions.” This method demonstrates that European archival sources rarely used the term *religion* to describe Africana religious practices, and modern scholars too often replicate these colonial sources.

Studying the intentional exclusion of Africana religio-political practices like Obeah from the category of religion is just as important as studying the construction of religion—if not more so. Scholars must be as attuned to the *absence* of religion as a category as to its presence. My methodological approach is inspired by Londa Schiebinger’s concept of agnotology—the study of things that have been intentionally forgotten—and by studies of the African diaspora

that counter epistemic violence and read colonial archives with an eye toward histories that have been suppressed.¹⁷ I am especially influenced by studies of slavery and the archive, although these are rarely included in scholarship on the construction of religion. I argue that it is essential to attend to Africana scholarship and to read colonial and missionary archives for irruptions in order to identify epistemological formations outside the colonial construction of religion.

Ultimately, Africana traditions such as Obeah were both religions and sources of political power. In this way, Obeah can be compared to colonial political formations, which also sought to harness the power of the sacred to bind people together, a theme I explore in chapter 6. In keeping with this analysis, a larger argument of *Archival Irruptions* builds on the field of political theology, which emphasizes the interconnection between religion and politics. As a result, I often use the word *religio-political* to describe Obeah, and I argue that Obeah is a component of Africana religio-nation formation.

Re/formations of Crime

Many anti-colonial religious traditions—particularly those that were practiced under slavery—continue to be excluded from histories of religion because European authorities refused to recognize them as religions, and our archival documents bear that legacy. That refusal—a form of epistemic violence—was, I argue, the product of white colonials’ and slaveholders’ fear of slave rebellion and anti-colonial protest. Slave-owning lawmakers regarded Africana religious practices as dangerous, blamed Black religious leaders for slave rebellions, and categorized their practices as criminal. In thinking through the co-construction of religion and crime, my project builds on recent scholarship that has shown how policing the boundaries of religion has played—and continues to play—a central role in colonial and postcolonial governance.¹⁸ By comparing slave law with missionary records that trace everyday life, it is possible to examine the dynamic creation of new ideas about “legitimate” religion and “criminal” worship practices. In doing so, *Archival Irruptions* argues that no study of religion can ignore the history of criminalization that has delegitimized and sought to eradicate sources of religious power that were used to protest against the colonial state.

Material objects were central to the way that missionaries and Protestant colonists defined and policed African religious and political practice. In fact, it is essential to stress that colonial lawmakers utilized a terminology in their lawbooks that limited most descriptions of African religious practice to a description of *objects*. Take, for example, the aforementioned 1760 Jamaican law. It specified that anyone who should make use of “any Blood, Feathers, Parrots Beaks, Dogs Teeth, Alligators Teeth, Broken Bottles, Grave Dirt, Rum, Egg-shells or any other Materials

relative to the Practice of Obeah or Witchcraft” shall be convicted of “death or Transportation.”¹⁹ The word *religion* was rarely used in conjunction with African practices. This tactic, I argue, was intentional—an attempt to delegitimize African diasporic religious and intellectual history by materializing it. Within the context of Protestant theology and political theory, the emphasis on the material operated to exclude Africans from the sphere of the legitimately religious.

Re/formations of Race

The category of religion was constituted alongside evolving ideas about race and the creation of racial slavery. In my first book, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World*, I showed how British, Dutch, and Danish slave owners initially justified the enslavement of Africans and indigenous people through religious difference—what I call Protestant Supremacy. Protestant slave owners forbade enslaved people from accessing Christian rites, since Christianity—and especially Protestantism—was associated with freedom and political power. Over time, however, as enslaved and free Blacks fought their way into Protestant churches, slave-owning legislators inserted the term *white* into their law books to replace *Christian*. As they did so, White Supremacy overtook Protestant Supremacy as the dominant ideology of slavery.

Even as whiteness became more established and racial hierarchies formed the core of social ordering, religion played a fundamental role in codifying forms of belonging, power, and authority.²⁰ In eighteenth-century Jamaica, Protestant Christianity—and especially Anglicanism—was primarily coded as white. Meanwhile, most white Europeans coded Obeah as Black and African. Despite this, the Moravian records suggest that Africans and Afro-Jamaicans did not categorize Obeah solely as African or Black. By associating Obeah with a European Moravian missionary and interpreting Christian rituals through the lens of Obeah, we gain insight into African epistemological formations surrounding both Obeah and Christianity that did not have the same racial implications as they did for white colonials.

While *Obeah* and *Christianity* eventually became oppositional terms, this was a consequence of colonial oppression: lawmakers made a concerted effort to criminalize and racialize religio-political practices such as Obeah as Black. By the end of the eighteenth century, Moravian missionaries—like other white colonials—were explicitly positioning Obeah as antithetical to Christianity.²¹ The complicated relationship between Obeah, Christianity, whiteness, and Africanness shows how race and religion can be understood through what Aisha Khan calls a “parallax view,” in which the nexus of race and religion is continually evolving.²²

While writing this book, I became invested in the metalanguage of history—in the metaphors that I noticed myself using to understand the past: Was I unearthing, recovering, or uncovering documents and stories?²³ I observed that archivally trained historians often use ocular, aural, or wood-based metaphors to discuss the relationship between themselves and their objects of study. Interpretations offer a lens, while the archive has grains that one can go with or against.²⁴ Silences refer to the gaps—intentional or unintentional—that led to the exclusion of specific forms of knowledge within archival sources.²⁵ As I thought more about archives and metaphor, I turned to the insights offered by Native American and Indigenous studies (NAIS) scholarship to guide my own interpretations.²⁶ The historian Lisa Brooks describes writing history as “an inquiry into *pildowi ôjmowôgan*, the cyclical, spiraling process through which we (inclusive or exclusive) collectively participate in recovering and narrating ‘a new history.’”²⁷ In *Our Beloved Kin*, Brooks elaborates on her approach to archives, colonialism, and metaphor: “Among the goals of this book is to provide, reveal, and restore alternative ‘narrative fields,’ which have sometimes arisen quite unexpectedly from the archive of colonial documents, like ‘weeds’ breaking through soil into that well-established ‘field.’”²⁸

Brooks’s metaphor about the “narrative field” of colonialism offered a guide for me as I thought about the narratives that emerged from the Moravian missionaries’ diaries. The missionaries’ narrative field was unavoidable: Their desire to carry the gospel to the “heathen,” their conception of Christian baptism, their ideas about the true conversion of the heart, their beliefs about what constitutes Christian behavior, and their convictions about sin form the dominant narrative of their documents. At the same time, there were alternative narrative fields that emerged from the missionaries’ writing, like the “weeds” that Brooks describes, “breaking through soil into that well-established ‘field.’”²⁹

Archival Irruptions takes a twofold approach to the Moravian archives. First, I do not ignore the landscape of the missionaries’ narrative field—instead, I aim to describe and analyze it carefully, examining both the missionaries’ efforts to create a coherent narrative about their experiences as well as the disjunctures that appear in their sources—especially in the discordant diaries of different missionaries. Second, I use my analysis of the missionary field of narration to identify and examine the “weeds” that break through their narratives—what I call archival irruptions. These irruptions offer, as Brooks puts it, opportunities for “alternative narrations.”

To draw out these alternative narrations, I take inspiration from Africana religious studies. As Dianne Stewart and Tracey Hucks explain, Africana

peoples have been forced to “(1) endure tangible encounters with Catholic and Protestant missiology; (2) withstand the demonization of African religious cosmologies; (3) contest the infantilization of African rituals; and (4) subvert the criminalization of African practices while protecting the integrity of their inner cosmologies and meanings.”³⁰ In their vision for Africana religious studies, Stewart and Hucks argue that multiple methods are needed to counter the “epistemic racism” that has marked African diasporic history. *Archival Irruptions* is intended as a contribution to the field of Africana religious studies by reading archival sources for irruptions that can be interpreted by drawing upon the rich fields of African and African diasporic scholarship. In doing so, I aim to recenter the lives, experiences, and perspectives of men and women who were targeted by systemic repression and criminalization.

Methodologically, reading for irruptions requires three steps: (1) analyzing the narrative field of the archival producer, (2) identifying irruptions in the archive’s narrative field, and (3) immersing oneself in scholarship that can help to interpret the irruptions. The final step is essential, since the narrative fields of archival producers often suppress, misunderstand, or censor the epistemological frameworks and intellectual histories of enslaved and colonized peoples.

There are two additional layers of analysis that are important for interpreting irruptions: first, scholars must attend to the *process* of archiving by considering why their sources were preserved. This inquiry aligns with Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s “moment of fact assembly (the making of archives)” and with Ann Stoler’s conceptualization of archiving-as-process rather than archives-as-things.³¹ Second, as scholars examine irruptions in the archive, they should play close attention to their own reactions. Drawing on Zeb Tortorici’s concept of “visceral archives,” I argue that recognizing how we feel when we do archival research is important for two reasons: first, it can attune us to the toll that archival research can have on our own bodies; and second, our visceral reactions are themselves important indicators that can help us as we search for irruptions.³² Over the course of my research for this book, there were several moments when I felt myself become surprised or turn away in revulsion. As I thought about my own visceral reactions and why they were produced, I used this somatic knowledge to deepen my analysis of archival irruptions.

Microhistory and the Moravian Archives

Archival Irruptions is primarily focused on an analysis of the Moravian missionary archive, most of which is written in German Script, an archaic form of handwritten German also known as *Kurrent* or *Sütterlin*.³³ The Moravian

sources include letters, diaries, and church membership records written by white missionaries and—in some cases—Black Christians who were members of the Moravian Church. These records have been largely ignored by Atlantic and Caribbean historians because most are written in an archaic form of handwritten German.³⁴ Over the past fifteen years, I have transcribed hundreds of pages of *Kurrent* into modern German, and then translated them into English.³⁵ *Archival Irruptions* is the first book-length academic study based on the Moravian archives from eighteenth-century Jamaica, and I include excerpts and translations from archival sources in appendix 2 and an accompanying website in the hopes that more scholars can easily access and use these materials.³⁶

Archival Irruptions utilizes a microhistorical methodology for three reasons. First, through a sustained investigation of a specific community, it is possible to see how everyday concerns—such as creating and sustaining sacred bonds, avoiding violence and illness, and caring for intimate relationships—were vital and consequential in determining the boundaries of religion, Christianity, and Obeah. Second, microhistories are an important methodological tool for telling African diasporic histories and remembering the individual human lives caught up in the overwhelming horror of the transatlantic slave trade and Caribbean slavery. A microhistorical scope also reveals important patterns in Africana history: Using the Moravian records, for example, we can see how the community of Afro-Caribbeans that came together to worship in the mid-1750s was transnational and dynamic.³⁷ By closely reading baptismal registers and Moravian diaries, we can identify how first- and second-generation Africans were re/forming families and communities, and we can chart the emergence of new Africana religio-nations, as I describe in chapter 2.

Finally, a microhistorical approach allows me to read for archival irruptions with care and specificity. Over the course of my research, I examined and compared the production of archival manuscripts by multiple individuals, showing how missionaries described the same events in different ways. I identified and analyzed cases of censorship, showing how knowledge about religion and violence was contoured and erased. I also compared Moravian missionary sources to accounts written by white English colonials, showing how they overlap and diverge. Over the years, I compiled scattered references to dozens of enslaved and free Black men and women, connecting them to reveal kinship bonds and surprising stories.

It is worth noting that this type of archival analysis is time-consuming. This book is a microhistory for many reasons, but one is practical: it is laborious to do archival research with an eye toward irruptions. This is especially true when the archival sources are handwritten in archaic scripts and/or languages

that are non-native to the scholar. While these methodological strategies take time, they are important: by identifying the “weeds,” as Brooks calls them, that break through the narrative field of colonial archives, we can utilize European sources to tell Africana stories.

Chapter Outline

The first half of this book is titled “Obeah,” because Obeah is one such “weed” that emerges—not systematically, but unexpectedly—from a missionary letter. It is discordant with the narrative the missionaries are trying to write, and through the disjuncture, I seek to write an alternative narrative about the mission that reframes Christianity through the lens of Obeah. Part 1 begins in 1755 on the Bogue plantation in St. Elizabeth Parish, Jamaica, where the Moravian missionary Zacharias George Caries arrived with two other European missionaries, Gottlieb Haberecht and Thomas Shallecross, to evangelize to Africans and African-descended people. The following year, Caries founded the nearby mission station known as Carmel (formerly Risbys), which served as headquarters for the mission. The first three chapters focus on records that Caries and Haberecht produced in 1755 and 1756—before the arrival of the Moravian missionary Christian Heinrich Rauch in 1757.³⁸ While these chapters use Caries’s handwritten manuscripts as their primary source, they reframe them: Instead of a narrative about missionary encounter, these chapters identify and examine a series of Africana irruptions in missionary diaries and letters.

Chapter 1, “Africana Irruptions” uses an offhand comment by Caries to reconsider how Afro-Jamaicans perceived the presence of a Moravian missionary. Building on scholarship about Obeah and Afro-Caribbean linguistic, religious, political, and medical history, it argues that scholars should interpret Moravian Christianity through the epistemology of Obeah. It then rereads Caries’s diaries for evidence of what Caries did to become known as an Obeah man, offering a framework for understanding Obeah before its criminalization.

The second chapter, “Religio-Nations in the Archives,” takes a different methodological approach to the missionary records. It is a close study of the first Afro-Jamaican members of the Moravian church, based on church registers and diaries. Caries’s baptismal records include references to each individual’s African nation and, in some cases, the nations of their parents and grandparents. This chapter argues that the nation designators can be interpreted as archival irruptions and posits that Afro-Moravians were forming a new religion within the Moravian congregation. The concept of a religio-nation, furthermore, should be understood as part of the semantic field of Obeah.

Enslaved people were not the only people of African descent to interact with the missionaries. Beginning in 1755, just a few months after his arrival, Caries met Accompong, a Maroon leader who governed a town in the interior of Jamaica. Maroons were free Blacks who founded separate communities in the mountainous region of the island. After decades of warfare with colonial forces, Maroon leaders—including Accompong—signed a peace treaty with the British in 1739. Chapter 3, “Maroons, Blood Oaths, and Gendered Irruptions,” reads the missionary archives to reveal the central role that one Maroon woman named Margery played in sustaining Maroon sovereignty and cultivating bonds between the Maroons and enslaved people.

Part II begins in January 1757, when the Moravian missionary Christian Heinrich Rauch arrived at the Bogue with his wife, Anna Rauch, and another missionary couple, Charles and Maria Schulz. Anna Rauch’s presence had a profound impact on the type of information that her husband recorded. Moreover, the simultaneous production of three daily diaries—from Christian Rauch, Caries, and Schulz—offers opportunities for historians. The second half of this book is titled “*Heuchelei*,” a German word meaning “dissimulation” or “hypocrisy,” and it explores why the Moravians lost their status as Obeah men in the years after Rauch’s arrival. Caries used the word *Heuchelei* to describe his devolving relationship with Afro-Moravians, but the word also characterized the relationship between Caries and Rauch, as the two missionaries disputed narratives and disagreed about the plan for the mission. I use the term *Heuchelei* to signal the breakdown of coherent mission narratives after Rauch’s arrival, and I argue that dissimulation in the archives offers an opportunity to tease out Africana narratives and to reveal censored stories from the disrupted narrative field of the Moravian missionary sources. Part II shows how scholars can gain insight into Africana diasporic histories by making these fault lines in our archival sources visible.

Chapter 4, “Archival Silence, Sexual Violence” interrogates a horrific rape that Christian Heinrich Rauch recorded in his diary. Rauch sent copies of his diaries to Moravian church leaders in Bethlehem and Herrnhut, where his words were copied, extracted, and circulated farther around the globe. In the process, the story of the young girl attacked by white colonials was censored and deleted. This chapter does three things: First, it interrogates the intentional erasure of sexual violence from the Moravian records. Second, it compares the production of knowledge about sexual violence in the Moravian missionary diaries to the better-known diary of Thomas Thistlewood to show the extent of silences in the missionary records. Finally, it asks what religion meant within the context of widespread sexual violence and draws on Alexis Wells-Oghoghomeh’s

framework of “re/membrance” to recenter the ethical and moral priorities of enslaved women.³⁹ I argue that the missionaries’ inability to protect their congregants from sexual violence was one reason that Afro-Moravians stopped viewing them as Obeah practitioners.

The arrival of new missionaries presented grave challenges to the day-to-day functioning of the Moravian mission. Chapter 5, “Policing Bodies, Saving Souls,” examines the feud between Caries and Rauch and argues that Rauch’s orientation toward policing and colonial law meant that there was no longer a “space of correlation” between Obeah and Moravian Christianity. In 1759, Caries was expelled from the mission while Rauch severed ties with the Accompong Town Maroons and sought to align the mission with the colonial government. During this time, many Afro-Caribbeans stopped attending worship meetings. While the missionaries interpreted their behavior through the framework of “sin,” chapter 5 argues that from an Africana perspective, the missionaries had failed as Obeah men.

In 1760, the largest slave rebellion in the eighteenth-century British Empire broke out in Jamaica. The missionaries recorded the movements of rebels and the white militia in their diaries and letters. Tacky’s Revolt, as the rebellion came to be called, led to a major shift in the policing of the enslaved population. Most notably, as described earlier, it led colonial lawmakers to criminalize Obeah. Chapter 6, “Constructing Religion, Defining Crime,” assesses the meaning of “lived religion” during the rebellion. It then examines the criminalization of Obeah in the context of a broader, global shift in the construction of religion as a category. It argues that lawmakers used the category of religion as a tool to police enslaved people. In order to counter this epistemic violence, scholars need to change the way they identify religion in their sources by attending to processes of assembling, congregating, and binding.

The construction of religion was an ongoing and contentious process, particularly under slavery. Even as missionaries and colonial authorities sought to police the boundaries of religion to exclude Afro-Caribbean practices, enslaved and free Blacks were participating in the re/formation of religion. The epilogue argues that historians and religious studies scholars must attend to archival irruptions in their research to counter the legacies of slavery and colonization that marked the formation of religion in the early modern world. Without reading for irruptions, we risk repeating the epistemic violence of our archives.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. “An Act to Remedy the Evils arising from irregular Assemblies of Slaves,” Jamaica, 1760, in Colonial Office 139/21, National Archives (Kew), London (hereafter cited as CO). Historical background and Obeah-related sections of the act are available on the Obeah Histories blog, accessed November 18, 2024, <https://Obeahhistories.org/1760-jamaica-law/>.

2. Zacharias George Caries to Johannes Watterville, March 17, 1755, *Gemein Nachrichten* 5 (1755), GN 1755 5 A.44 (I–XL), 743–47, Unitätsarchiv der Evangelischen Brüder-Unität, Herrnhut, Germany (hereafter cited as UA). The original German reads, “Sie heißen mich Obea, welches bedeuten soll einen Seher, oder einen der zukünftige dinge weis.” See appendix 2 for a longer excerpt of the letter.

3. See, for example, Boaz, *Banning Black Gods*; Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah*; Paton and Forde, eds., *Obeah and Other Powers*; Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*; Beliso-De Jesús, *Excited Delirium*.

4. Aside from Brooks, I draw most explicitly on Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s analysis of archival “silences”; Ann Stoler’s approach to the archive as ethnography; Marisa Fuentes’ concept of reading “along the bias grain,” and Zeb Tortorici’s concept of “visceral archives.” Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*; Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*; Tortorici, *Sins Against Nature*; Tortorici, “Visceral Archives of the Body.” In critical archival studies, see especially Caswell, Punzalan, and Sangwand, “Critical Archival Studies”; Caswell, “‘The Archive’ Is Not an Archives”; Sutherland, “Disrupting Carceral Narratives”; Lowry, “Displaced Archives”; Lowry, *Disputed Archival Heritage*; Hughes-Watkins, “Moving Toward a Reparative Archive.” On Caribbean archives, see Aarons, Bastian, and Griffin, *Archiving Caribbean Identity*; Bastian, Aarons, and Griffin, *Decolonizing the Caribbean Record*; Griffin, “Value Displaced, Value Re/Claimed.” For decolonial methods and Indigenous studies, see especially Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. On Religious Studies and archives, see especially Greene-Hayes, “Hair, Roots, and Crystal Balls.”

5. Brooks, “Awikigawôgan Ta Pildowi Ôjmowôgan,” 259–94; Brooks, *Our Beloved Kin*.

6. "Irrupt, v." and "Irruption, n.," *OED Online*. Accessed February 2, 2025.
7. The Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, PA, offers one of the only courses in the United States on German Script. For more information, see <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2847251598>.
8. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*; Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*.
9. On "spaces of correlation," see Fromont, *The Art of Conversion*.
10. The Moravians trace their lineage to the followers of Jan Hus in the fifteenth century, but they renewed their church in 1727, after Moravian refugees settled on the estate of Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a Pietist who became the leader of the Renewed Unitas Fratrum. For more on Zinzendorf and his theology, see Vogt, "Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf"; Geiger, "Zinzendorf Stellung zum Halleschen Busskampf und zum Bekehrungserlebnis"; Beyreuther, *Die große Zinzendorf Trilogie*; Brecht and Peucker, *Neue Aspekte der Zinzendorf-Forschung*. For more on the early period of the Renewed Moravian Church, see Peucker, *Herrnhut*; Meyer, "Zinzendorf und Herrnhut."
11. On the Moravian global missions in the eighteenth-century, see Beck, *Brüder in Vielen Völkern*; Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival*; Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan*; Fogleman, *Two Troubled Souls*; Fogleman, "A Moravian Mission"; Mettele, *Weltbürgertum oder Gottesreich*; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, chaps. 7–8; Kaelin, "To Be Proposed As Useful"; Wheeler, *To Live upon Hope*; Wheeler and Eyerly, "Singing Box 331"; Merritt, "Dreaming of the Savior's Blood"; Catron, *Embracing Protestantism*; Peucker, "Aus allen Nationen."
12. For the role of Moravians in the eighteenth-century Atlantic World, including the transatlantic Great Awakening, see Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*; Gillespie and Beachy, *Pious Pursuits*; Roeber, "The Waters of Rebirth"; Engel, *Religion and Profit*; Atwood, *Community of the Cross*; Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female*.
13. On the rise of Black Protestantism in the eighteenth-century Atlantic World, see Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*; Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*; Seeman, "'Justise Must Take Plase'"; Sobel, *Trabelin' On*; Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival*; Sensbach, "'Don't Teach My Negroes to Be Pietists'"; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*; Butler, "Africans' Religions in British America"; Andrews, *Native Apostles*; Catron, *Embracing Protestantism*; Catron, "Evangelical Networks"; Dickerson, *African Methodist Episcopal Church*, chap. 1.
14. For the foundation of the debate on African retentions, see Frazier, "The Negro Family in Bahia," 465–78; Herskovits, "The Negro in Bahia, Brazil," 394–404; Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*. For a helpful survey of the debate and its impact, see Stewart Diakité and Hucks, "Africana Religious Studies," 31–36.
15. See, for example, Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Matory, "From 'Survival' to 'Dialogue'"; Palmié, *Africas of the Americas*; Stewart Diakité and Hucks, "Africana Religious Studies"; Beliso-De Jesús, *Electric Santería*; Wells-Oghoghomeh, *The Souls of Womenfolk*; Hucks, *Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity*; Stewart, *Obeah, Orisa and Religious Identity*.
16. In Jonathan Z. Smith's now-classic article, "Religion, Religions, Religious," he argued that religion was used by colonizers to describe the religion (or non-religion) of colonial "others." Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 269–84. On the construction of religion and colonialism, see also Chidester, *Empire of Religion*; Chidester, *Savage Systems*; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

17. Schiebinger, "Agnotology and Exotic Abortifacients"; Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*.
18. See, for example, Paton and Forde, *Obeah and Other Powers*; Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah*; Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*; Boaz, *Banning Black Gods*.
19. "An Act to Remedy the Evils," CO 139/21.
20. On the evolving relationship between religion and race in the Atlantic World, see Harvey and Lum, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race*; Khan, *The Deepest Dye*; Lum, *Heathen*; Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia*; Kopelson, *Faithful Bodies*; Bailey, *Race and Redemption*; Brewer-García, *Beyond Babel*; Rowe, *Black Saints*; Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*; Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming*.
21. McGeary, "On Fanaticism and Funding."
22. Aisha Khan has argued that "racial and religious identities necessarily and always work in some kind of conjunction," so the "racialization of religion and the 'religionization of race' define, substantiate, and justify identities and the hierarchies that rank them." Khan, *The Deepest Dye*, 15 and 27.
23. On the term *recovery*, see especially the special issue of *Social Text* edited by Helton et al., "The Question of Recovery," 1–18.
24. For the metaphor of reading "along the archival grain," see especially Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*. For reading "along the bias grain," see Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*. Other texts that have influenced my thinking about archives include Tortorici, *Sins Against Nature*; Tortorici, "Visceral Archives of the Body"; Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts"; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.
25. On "silences," see especially Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.
26. This is partially due to my reading of NAIS scholarship, but also thanks to the network of colleagues and graduate students that I have been fortunate to be in conversation with at the University of Minnesota. I am especially grateful to David Chang, Jeani O'Brien, and Sarah Pawlicki. For NAIS methods and early American studies, see the joint issue of *William and Mary Quarterly* and *Early American Literature*, coedited by Pleasant et al., "Materials and Methods in Native American and Indigenous Studies."
27. Brooks, "Awikhighawôgan Ta Pildowi Ôjmowôgan," 264.
28. Brooks, *Our Beloved Kin*, 10.
29. Brooks, *Our Beloved Kin*, 10.
30. Stewart Diakité and Hucks, "Africana Religious Studies," 42.
31. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 20.
32. Tortorici, *Sins Against Nature*; Tortorici, "Visceral Archives of the Body."
33. The majority of archival sources from the Moravian mission to Jamaica are located in Herrnhut, Germany, at the Unitätsarchiv der Evangelischen Brüder-Unität and the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (hereafter MAB). There are also important sources available at the Moravian Church House in London (hereafter MCH) that are not available in either Bethlehem or Herrnhut. The archival material related to Jamaica at the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem was recently digitized and is now available at Moravian Archives, Digital Resources, <https://www.moravianchurcharchives.findbuch.net/php/main.php#4d6973734a6d63>. The sources in Herrnhut have not been digitized, but there is a finding aid available online. For the most up-to-date information about how to access Moravian sources globally, see <https://moravianarchives.net/find-out-whats-in-our-archival-collections/>.

34. In recent years, more scholars have begun to integrate Moravian records about the Danish West Indies into research on the Caribbean and Atlantic history, but the Moravian records remain a largely untapped resource, particularly for the study of African diasporic history. One of the problems is that very few Caribbean scholars are trained in German, and those who do know German still have to learn how to read German Script. For some of the recent research that draws on the Moravian archives in the Caribbean, see especially Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival*; Catron, *Embracing Protestantism*; Kaelin, "To Be Proposed as Useful." There are also important studies being published in German that use the Moravian archives from the Caribbean. See, for example, Hüsgen, *Mission und Sklaverei*.

35. I have benefited from the aid of graduate research assistants who have helped with the unwieldy transcription and translation process. Many thanks to Adam Blackler, Tanner Deeds, and Stephan Knott.

36. Additional transcriptions and translations are available on my website, www.katharinegerbner.com.

37. Here, I draw especially on J. Lorand Matory's analysis of paradigms of interpretation and the underlying logics of religion within a transatlantic framework. In *Black Atlantic Religion*, Matory situates Candomblé within a "supralocal geographical context" and shows how local traditions in Brazil and West Africa were developing in relationship to each other and in relation to other systems, traditions, and practices, including European and Native American. For Matory, "Afro-Atlantic dialogue" is an essential paradigm to understand Black Atlantic religion. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 34–35.

38. Thomas Shallecross died soon after his arrival in Jamaica, so he did not produce archival documents.

39. Wells-Oghoghomeh, *The Souls of Womenfolk*.

INTRODUCTION TO PART I

1. Caries, December 24, 1756, "Diary of Jamaica [Bogue estate]," MAB Miss Jmc 3.
2. Caries, December 31, 1756, "Diary of Jamaica [Bogue estate]," MAB Miss Jmc 3.
3. Caries, November 21, 1756, "Diary of Jamaica [Bogue estate]," MAB Miss Jmc 3; "Katalog der Getauften in Jamaica," UA R.15.C.a.02.9.a. Caries only baptized men. No women were baptized until Anna Rauch, the first female missionary to Jamaica, arrived in December 1756. I discuss this gender dynamic at greater length in chapter 4.
4. Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*, chaps. 7–8.
5. Glasson, "Missionaries, Slavery, and Race," 307; Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*.
6. Haberecht, December 24, 1756, "Diary of Jamaica [Bogue estate]," MAB Miss Jmc 2.

I. AFRICANA IRRUPTIONS

Parts of this chapter are drawn from my article "'They Call Me Obea': German Moravian Missionaries and Afro-Caribbean Religion in Jamaica, 1754–1760," *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 12, no. 2 (2015): 160–78. I am grateful to *Atlantic Studies* for permission to reprint portions of my article.