

Chapter 6 A Slave's Cosmopolitanism: Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, and the Geography of Identity

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Chapter 6

A Slave's Cosmopolitanism: Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, and the Geography of Identity

Mary Prince, the orator of the first slave narrative by a woman in the Americas, was born into slavery in 1788, just three years before the foundations of the Caribbean and the Atlantic world more broadly were to be profoundly shaken by the revolution in Haiti. She was born in Bermuda, an island chain 988 miles from Haiti, and even spent several years working on Turks Island, a site through which many British slaves escaped to Haiti.¹ Her narrative, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, was published in 1831, three years before the official abolition of slavery in the British colonies. Prince's representations of the grounds of connection or disconnection between enslaved Blacks throughout the region, and her approach to finding and articulating her own sense of regional, colonial, and racial identity intervene in debates about the meanings and limits of West Indianness, Englishness, subjectivity, and humanity swirling throughout the Anglophone Atlantic world during her lifetime.

Her status as a pivotal pioneer in the public and published articulation of Black West Indian identity is highlighted by the fact that her concerns and her approaches to conceptualizing and articulating identity are echoed frequently in both later nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Caribbean texts. Afro-Trinidadian John Jacob Thomas, author of *Froudacity*, the famous 1889 rejoinder to English writer J. A. Froude's questioning of Blacks' capacity for civilization, is a descendant of Prince in terms of his public back-answering of colonial ideas about West Indian Blacks.² The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a relative explosion in critical attention to nineteenth-century Black women writers, Afro-Caribbean writers in general, and Afro-Caribbean women writers in particular. Cheryl Fish, for example, keys in on the "mobile subjectivity" of free Black women traveler-writers African

American Nancy Prince and Jamaican-born Mary Seacole, both free black women.³ From Jean D'Costa and Barbara Lalla's *Voices in Exile* published in 1989, a pathbreaking collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jamaican texts, to Moira Ferguson's edited work *Nine Black Women*, a compilation of nineteenth-century Black women writers of the Americas published in 1998, early Caribbean writing has been resituated in the discourse on Caribbean Literature, and on early Black Americas writing. Key critical works by Sandra Pouchet Paquet and Amy Robinson have affirmed early Afro-Caribbean women's writing as an especially vital and fruitful locus of inquiry. In two major articles published in *African-American Review* Paquet holds up Mary Prince and Mary Seacole as presenting two distinct models for West Indian identity.⁴ Amy Robinson adds to this discourse by reading Mary Seacole's crafting of her public image in order to garner authority, to establish her reputation as an "exceptional British subject."⁵ In the introduction to *Out of the Kumbla*, a collection of critical essays on twentieth-century Caribbean women's writing edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, the editors point to the longstanding silencing of Caribbean women writers, specifically "the absence of critical discussion of existing works by Caribbean women writers."⁶

A major concern of this growing critical discourse can be aptly characterized as the exploration of roots and routes—of articulations of West Indian subjectivities and of the impact of travel/displacement/movement on relationships to and definitions of West Indian subjectivity.⁷ Slaves and self-determined movement or relationships to place are, however, often presumed to be mutually exclusive, both in this discourse and beyond. I am arguing that this is not so, and that Prince's approaches to defining self and other and her relationships to home, region, and world certainly identify her as a foremother of this discourse. She should be a crucial part of the burgeoning discourse on Black transnationalism, a discourse that has focused primarily on men and primarily on twentieth-century texts. Slave narratives, whether as cosmopolitan as Prince's or as geographically limited as Douglass's, must be understood as part of the background of discourses on/of Black transnationalism. If these texts are key indicators of the processes by which Black identities developed (as work by scholars like Houston Baker, William Andrews, and Frances Smith Foster highlights), they are also key indicators of the processes by which the conceptual groundwork was laid for writers/thinkers like W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and Gayl Jones.

Prince in Context

Prince, the slave, begins life in Bermuda as the “little n____r” (pet) of “Miss Betsey.” As she herself notes, as a child she was blissfully unaware of the horrors of slavery: “This was the happiest period of my life; for I was too young to understand rightly my condition as a slave.”⁸ When her mistress dies, her life and perspective are changed forever. In addition to suffering through slavery on the island of Bermuda, Prince is forced to endure two of the most brutal situations for slaves in the British Caribbean—the salt mines of Turks Island and the plantations of Antigua. Toward the end of her life she goes to England with her enslavers with the hope that she will be able to secure her freedom there—after all, slavery on English soil had been declared illegal in 1772.⁹ While in England, Prince narrated *The History of Mary Prince* to Susanna Strickland, guest of Anti-Slavery Society secretary Thomas Pringle. (Prince disappeared from the public record in 1833.)

The British West Indies of Mary Prince's era was a physical and ideological battleground. Apart from the numerous and ongoing battles with rebellious slaves in Jamaica and Antigua in particular, British West Indian planters also had to deal with the significant dips in prices and in the availability of markets and suppliers brought about by the American Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and the British Crown's determination to protect its own financial interests, even if doing so came at the expense of the West Indian planters.¹⁰ In addition, the already formidable abolitionist movement in England was gaining steam. Organizations such as the Anti-Slavery Society, of which Prince's editor was the secretary, were mounting successful challenges to the White West Indians' way of life, challenges that forced the White West Indians to begin to talk about reform and/or gradual emancipation to maintain a semblance of financial security. At the same time insecurity about the meaning of Englishness and English national identity was rampant both in England and throughout the colonies. In particular, as historian Kathleen Wilson details, there was an ongoing debate throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries about whether Englishness was an in-born essence (as Burke suggests when he describes nation as “a moral essence, not a geographical arrangement”), or a contingency based on “proximity and shared language, laws, government and social organization.”¹¹ White West Indian planters' anxieties about whether the right to Englishness ended on the shores of England come across clearly throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in their complaints about royal policy that are framed as

pleas for assistance and/or protection. The records of the Jamaica Assembly from the early to mid-eighteenth century, for example, reveal that the members felt the need constantly to emphasize their position as English subjects, and by extension as individuals entitled to royal protection. The Assembly, for example, writes in 1740:

We, your majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the council and assembly of the island of Jamaica, being conscious to ourselves, of your gracious, constant, and paternal care of your subjects in general, and of this your colony of Jamaica in particular, should be highly wanting in our duty, did we not faithfully represent unto your majesty, our grievances and apprehensions. We beg leave, with the greatest humility, to lay before your majesty how much we are alarmed at the endeavours of designing men to import foreign rum, without paying of the duty, contrary to the known and confirmed laws of this island; and it is a matter of the greatest concern to us, when we reflect, that this importation is supported by an order of your majesty's council.¹²

The members emphasize their position as English subjects, and by extension as individuals entitled to royal protection, repeatedly. Also evident in the comments, though, is a nascent sense of themselves as West Indian subjects, as subjects who, while linked to England, also have separate interests and affinities.

This burgeoning sense of West Indian particularity is evident even earlier in the eighteenth century when the members of the assembly in 1714 write a letter to the Queen expressing their displeasure with a Crown appointee:

We most humbly beseech your majesty that William Brodrick, esquire, your majesty's late attorney general here . . . may never for the future be admitted into any office or employment of honour, profit, or trust *in this island*. The assembly of this, *your majesty's island*, on the eighteenth day of December last, taking into consideration the behaviour and evil practices of the said William Brodrick, did resolve, that he was a forger of lies, . . . and a common disturber of the peace of *this island*; and that your majesty's subjects of this *your majesty's island* could never expect to be at ease or in safety, while he continued in any office or place of honour, profit, or *trust in this island*.¹³

The assembly members, while making sure to seem appropriately humble (“humbly beseech,” “your majesty's island”), strongly speak for and from their island and demand that the Queen go along with a decision they have already made on their own. The rhetorical parrying, specifically the balancing of humility and assertiveness, in this letter is striking. They alternate between attributing the island to her majesty, and speaking as if their knowledge of what is best for the island should supersede hers. The assembly members go on to go so far as to feel they need to appoint “an agent in

Great-Britain, to solicit the passing of laws, and other the public affairs of this island,” the implication being that neither the Crown-appointed governor nor the English foreign affairs officials could really understand or represent the particular issues confronted by West Indians.¹⁴

The *History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* was published during a period when the battle over slave emancipation was at its height. (Emancipation in the British West Indies was officially pronounced in 1834, but did not take effect until four years later after the slaves had gone through an “apprenticeship system,” by which they learned how to live as free people.) As the abolitionist movement became stronger, tensions between the West Indian planters’ growing sense of West Indian rights to self-determination and the crown’s imposition of royal laws and pursuit of its own imperial interests were also heightened. The White West Indian planters had already been pushed into the position of advocating reform, and the British Parliament was clearly leaning heavily towards emancipation.¹⁵ *The History of Mary Prince*, as readers are told in the preface that precedes the narrative, was recorded and published at the request of Prince, who was in England at the time, and apparently cognizant of the special potential of this moment.

The debate over whether Blacks were civilized enough to handle being set free was profoundly implicated in the battle over emancipation. The idea that Blacks were not adequately prepared for life as free people was persistent in both proslavery and abolitionist discourse of the time. For example, in a moving antislavery treatise that powerfully details and decries the inhumanity and ungodliness that is slavery in the British West Indies, the Reverend Mr. Richard Bickell still notes that he is “no friend to immediate emancipation” because it would be “a great and incalculable injury to the Slaves themselves.” He argues for amelioration rather than immediate emancipation because the slaves “are generally speaking in so barbarous and unenlightened a state, so devoid of education and religion, that anarchy confusion, warfare, and blood, would be the dreadful effects of the too hasty and mistaken boon.”¹⁶ Furthermore, as Belinda Edmondson details, Englishness was “predicated on a notion of manhood,” that demanded that Blacks had to prove that they could become English gentlemen in order to have any possibility at all of becoming Englishmen.¹⁷ Inherent in that formulation was the denigration or displacement of Black West Indian women, who could certainly never become English gentlemen: “Female subjectivity lies outside of the paradigm.”¹⁸ Prince as a slave woman has access to neither (gentle)manhood nor, by extension, Britishness. Nevertheless, Prince pushes her way into the debates.

Prince vociferously avows the importance of her Black, female, West Indian voice, and that of her fellow slaves, in these debates over the present

and future of the West Indies. The method by which she does so distinguishes her from other nineteenth-century slave narrators. She makes her point by emphasizing her cognizance of and connection to the world beyond Bermuda, by exhibiting what I am terming “cosmopolitan consciousness.” This term describes the coexistence of an interest in, knowledge of, and engagement with the world at large with the embrace of a racially based notion of community. My use of the term cosmopolitan in describing Prince is intended both to echo the characterization of cosmopolitanism as a drive to define oneself in relation to the world beyond one’s own that undergirds conventional definitions and to interrogate the hierarchy and othering that they often also imply.

Cosmopolitanism was certainly a value in the British world in which Prince lived.¹⁹ Orientalism was one of the many forms it took in English discourse. It was a form that, despite the interest in and engagement with aspects of the Other implicit in it, also reified and reiterated notions of European superiority. Orientalists certainly exhibited an interest in the Other, but also, significantly, invented the Other with which they were engaging. As Edward Said says of Orientalism, it “puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.”²⁰ He notes further that “it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world.”²¹ (In this, Said anticipates the analyses of Mary Louise Pratt, who undertakes detailed analyses of the impact of encounters with the newly discovered, imaged, and imagined others on colonial European ideology, self-concepts, and worldviews.)

I would argue further that imperialism and colonialism themselves are forms of cosmopolitanism. Responses and resistance to these forms, then, are often also cosmopolitan. Pheng Cheah, for example, critiques Immanuel Kant’s utopian vision of international commerce and cosmopolitanism. Kant had a vision of cosmopolitical culture as the “promise of humanity’s freedom from, or control over . . . human finitude.”²² Karl Marx also posited a utopian cosmopolitanism, through which the proletariat would cast off loyalty to the nation and its economy in favor of the creation of “a universal class transcending boundaries.”²³ In using this term to describe a nineteenth-century person of African descent, I aim to suggest that this, along with the other manifestations of cosmopolitanism during the period (and slavery, of course), helped to shape the terms of people of African descents’ public articulations of self and representations of each other.

In my use of the term, I am also engaging more recent denotations,

such as those put forward by Ulf Hannerz that define cosmopolitanism as “an intellectual and esthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences,” “a competence of both a generalized and a more specialized kind,” “a personal ability to make one’s way into other cultures.”²⁴ I am arguing that Prince is not just an object, but is responding to a cosmopolitanism from above that is often violent, oppressive, White, and male, and positing an alternative vision of the meaning of cosmopolitan.²⁵ The specific ways in which Prince, as a slave woman, presents herself as a cosmopolitan subject while speaking to context-specific (to the British Empire and Bermuda) demands are my focus here.

Prince’s approach to representing and conceptualizing home is also part of her philosophy of identity, her cosmopolitan consciousness. Cosmopolitanism as traditionally defined also implies a particular relationship to home—specifically a detachment from a singular local place in favor of an embrace of all places, of the world. As Timothy Brennan puts it, the cosmopolite is “at home in the world.”²⁶ Cosmopolitan consciousness does not, however, necessarily depend on a detachment from home. It recalls Anthony Appiah’s notion of the “cosmopolitan patriot” in that sense. He characterizes the cosmopolitan patriot as one who “can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people.”²⁷ I distinguish my concept by its emphasis on positing oneself not only as a citizen of the world more broadly, but also of a Black world more specifically, while also acknowledging and maintaining a connection to one’s “native place,” as Prince terms Bermuda.

Connection to the “native place,” however, can become the “binaristic Blackness” described in the previous chapter. Cosmopolitan consciousness and binaristic blackness can, therefore, coexist in the same mind. As Ulf Hannerz notes, “cosmopolitanism also has a narcissistic streak.”²⁸ I have chosen to introduce the idea of the relationship between cosmopolitanism and parochialism, between cosmopolitan consciousness and binaristic Blackness, through Prince, rather than through Douglass, though, because Prince’s cosmopolitan consciousness appears in a nineteenth-century slave narrative, a genre traditionally limited in its geographical scope. Douglass’s more substantive engagements with the world beyond the U.S. take place in texts published after his narrative. Prince’s narrative is distinctive because *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* simultaneously brings into focus and raises questions about the identificatory, geographical, and spatial conventions of the slave narrative.

Prince's Racial Consciousness

As is evident in the content, context, and language of the references to those to whom she feels connected in the narrative, Mary Prince clearly values a conception of group identity based on race and condition. She unambiguously embraces the idea of Black and slave collectivism. She presents herself as fully invested and involved in the community. She speaks often of herself and her fellow slaves as a collective whose members share the same emotions, experiences, and dreams. In her recollection of the impact of the death of her first mistress, for example, she remembers, "all the slaves cried."²⁹ The effect of this highlighting of the collective is to make her narrative a text from which the voice of the collective, rather than that of an individual, emanates. Throughout the narrative she emphasizes the extent to which she is invested in telling the collective story of Black slaves in the West Indies.³⁰ In reporting the atmosphere surrounding the sale of her and her siblings away from her mother, Prince calls attention to the collective voice of the story she tells in two ways. She speaks of her mother's sense of common destiny with a fellow slave mother named Moll who watches the separation. Mary notes, "'Ay,' said my mother seeing her turn away and look at her child with the tears in her eyes, 'your turn will come next'" (4). Prince also highlights the collective by referencing the empathy felt by the broader slave community for her family, acknowledging sadly that "The slaves could say nothing to comfort us; they could only weep and lament with us." She uses the opportunity to situate this collective story within an even broader context, using it as an example of the damage that slavery in general does to all involved: "slavery hardens white people's hearts towards the blacks." The former statements illustrate Prince's view of social condition as a bond; the latter shows her explicit embrace of race as a basis for connection. Prince links them. She expresses a profound sense of connection to her fellow slaves, and repeatedly notes their demonstration of their connection to her. When she is sold away for the first time, she speaks warmly of the two slave women who welcomed her, and warned her of the harshness of the life she was beginning: "'Poor child, poor child!' they both said; 'you must keep a good heart, if you are to live here'" (5).

Significantly, neither geographical origin nor linguistic background matters to Prince in her conceptualization of her (racial) community. She shows as much empathy and love for "Hetty, a French Black," as she does for "a mulatto called Cyrus, who had been bought while an infant in his mother's

arms," Jack, "an African from the coast of Guinea," and all the slaves she meets and works with in Turks Island and in Antigua (6). In these moments of empathy, the grounds of her cosmopolitan consciousness surface. She is willing and able to acknowledge the varied geographical and cultural origins of individuals, while also recognizing and embracing them as members of her community. In Prince's eyes, the fact that Hetty is (or speaks) French presents no obstacle to her sentiments for Hetty. (Her bond with Jack, "an African who my master had brought from Guinea" similarly illustrates this fact.) It is significant that she feels this bond even before she has any personal contact with Hetty, further reiterating the racial aspect of her collectivism. Prince's attitude toward Hetty suggests that she sees Hetty as kin because they are both black, both slaves, and both women.

The only person of African descent with whom she does not express kinship is Martha Wilcox, a free mulatto woman. She describes Martha as "a saucy woman, very saucy," who "went and complained of me" to the mistress. Prince says of her relationship with Martha that "I thought it very hard for a coloured woman to have rule over me because I was slave and she was free" (14). Although this tension seems to suggest that Prince felt less connected to those who did not share her slave condition, the fact that she later married a free Black man suggests otherwise. What it does index is her disgust with an individual who seems not to share her ideas about the significance of racially based community. Martha Wilcox angers her not simply because she is free, but rather because she believes that her freedom makes her superior to slaves like Mary.

Mary Prince's "we" also extends to slaves on Turks Island and Antigua. Prince was sent to Turk's Island as punishment for her supposed incorrigibility. She makes a point of noting the connection between herself and the other Blacks on the ship, saying that she would "almost have been starved had it not been for the kindness of a black man, Anthony, and his wife, who had brought their own victuals, and shared them with me" (9). Significantly, the bulk of this extensive Turks Island section is primarily told in the first person plural. Prince details at length how "we" worked, what "we" did, what "we" were given to eat, and all that "we" experienced. For example, she says,

When we were ill, let our complaint be what it might, the only medicine given to us was a great bowl of hot salt water, with salt mixed with it which made us very sick. If we could not keep up with the rest of the gang of slaves, we were put into the stocks, and severely flogged . . . Yet, not the less, our master expected, after we had

thus been kept from the rest, and our limbs rendered stiff and sore with ill usage, that we should still go through the ordinary tasks . . . then we had no sleep—no rest—but were forced to work as fast as we could, and go on again all next day the same as usual. (11)

In addition, Prince tells the stories of individual slaves on Turks Island, showing her own and her fellow slaves' empathy for their colleagues and providing deeper insight into the horrors of slavery through these particular instances. She tells her readers of old Daniel, who was "lame in the hip" and whom the master would have beaten until "his skin was quite red and raw" and then have a bucket of salt thrown upon his never-healing wounds, which were often filled with maggots. She explains "he was an object of pity and terror to the whole gang of slaves, and in his wretched case we say, each of us, our own lot, if we should live to be as old" (11). She also tells the stories of Ben, strung up by his wrists for a crime actually committed by the master's son, and of the infirm old woman Sarah, beaten mercilessly by the overseer for not moving the wheelbarrow fast enough. Her sense of kinship with the slaves there is further illustrated by her attribution of the flood that "came down soon after and washed away many houses" to the Whites' wickedness.

In her discussion of her time in Antigua, Prince speaks warmly of an old slave woman who saved her life when she was sick with rheumatism. She tells her audience, "the old slave got the bark of some bush that was good for the pains, which she boiled in the hot water, and every night she came and put me into the bath . . . I don't know what I should have done, or what would have become of me, had it not been for her" (14). She also tells the emotional story of Henry, the black driver, who is wracked with pain over the atrocities he has been forced to commit against his people. In powerful and poignant language she tells of seeing him at a Methodist prayer meeting praying that both God and his fellow men would forgive him. She continues her argument that slavery strips the humanity of everyone involved by recalling, "he said it was a horrid thing for a ranger to have sometimes to beat his own wife or sister; but he must do so if ordered by his master" (16).

Mary Prince, as she presents herself in the narrative, clearly embraces both the idea of a black community and the need for the members consciously to manifest and act on that notion of community. In addition, her inclusion of Turk's Island and Antigua Blacks suggests that her conception of that community is not limited by geographical boundaries. It indexes a willingness to conceive of herself as linked to a world broader than her own "native place."

Prince's Ethnography

Mary Prince's detailed discussion of slave life in Turks Island and Antigua is more than an expression of racial kinship and identificatory breadth. It is also more than a useful detailing of specific instances that illustrate the horror that is life in slavery. It is the autoethnography of a community. Community autoethnography is another method by which cosmopolitan consciousness becomes manifest in Prince's text. Mary Louise Pratt defines ethnographic texts as "a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others." Autoethnographic texts, then, are texts "the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations."³¹

Prince directly challenges the widespread notion that slaves are happy:

I am often much vexed, and I feel great sorrow when I hear some people in this country [England] say, that the slaves do not need better usage, and do not want to be free. They believe the foreign people [the West Indians], who deceive them, and say slaves are happy. I say, Not so. How can slaves be happy when they have the halter round their neck and the whip upon their back? And are disgraced and thought no more of than beasts. (22–23)

She directly attacks the notion that slaves are incapable of forming or being part of civil society, by going into great detail in her descriptions of their values, social structures, and relationships with each other. In the process of introducing her fellow slaves' humanity, emotional life, family life, and civil society to the people of England, she makes the White West Indians into foreigners, "the foreign people" who deceive the English "and say slaves are happy" (22).

Community autoethnography is a text produced by the "othered" both to tell the story of the community and to talk back to the dominant discourse on the group. The ethnographic element of such a text resides not only in the references to the social structures or values of the community, but also in the way that detailing takes place. The use of the objective voice, in particular, highlights the ethnographic aspect of these discussions of other Blacks. Through her discussions of slave life in Turks Island and Antigua, that is, her community autoethnography, Prince tells the story of her broad community (one based on both race and condition) both as an objective outsider providing information to an uninformed public and as an invested insider experiencing the treatment described. She provides information in a way that suggests an expectation that the subject under discussion is foreign to her audience.

Prince's discussions of Turks Island and Antigua are clearly intended to provide information about the conditions under which these slaves must work. One quotation about Antigua in particular bears out this informational purpose in her outlining of the specific sequence of Sunday tasks: "On Sunday morning, each slave has to go out and gather a large bundle of grass; and, when they bring it home, they have all to sit at the manager's door and wait till he come out: often they have to wait there till past eleven o'clock, without any breakfast" (16). Her approach here reiterates her valuation of telling the story of her community. The almost objective tone decenters her, the individual, and spotlights others. I say almost objective because she does not completely distance herself from those about whom she speaks. Her insertion of the phrase "have to" in the phrase "they have to wait there till past eleven o'clock" communicates her, as the narrative voice's, sympathy/empathy for those who wait. The clause "without any breakfast" has a similar effect, magnifying the harshness of having to wait. This balancing of the objective/informational and the empathetic tone marks this section as illustrative of community autoethnography.³²

The mere fact that she even mentions Turks Island and Antigua distinguishes her narrative and the philosophy of Black identity contained therein from that of other nineteenth-century slave narrators. Mentioning other slave colonies, particularly one so closely linked to Haiti, and by extension her demonstrated determination to broaden her attack on slavery to include its functioning in multiple sites in the British empire, is simply not done in other nineteenth-century narratives, whether from the U.S. or from the other Americas. Autoethnographic tendencies are clearly evident in fiction and non-fiction texts of the nineteenth century, including African American intellectual Martin Delany's novel *Blake; Or, the Huts of America* (1859–1862) and Black Bostonian missionary Nancy Prince's pamphlet *The West Indies* (1844), both published after Prince's narrative.³³ For example, wherever he goes, Delany's revolutionary protagonist, Henry Blake, always collects information on the opinions and experiences of those with whom he comes into contact. When he arrives in Cuba he asks the young slave woman he meets "how are the slaves used here in Cuba? I understand they are well treated." In addition, he says to her, "what is your age? You look like a young woman, but you're quite gray and careworn," an approach that allows her to answer with information that iterates the point Delany wishes to make about brutality of slavery in Cuba.³⁴ Through Henry's questions and her answers he contradicts the idea that slavery was less harsh in Cuba than in the U.S. Delany's decision to construct his text in this way, that is, through an

individual who presents himself as a foreigner and objectively gains/tells information about the communities, reveals a tendency towards community autoethnography. He chooses to communicate contextual information through an ethnographer-subject situation. Henry, like Mary Prince, goes back and forth between the objective and subjective voice in his requesting and articulating of information.

Black Bostonian missionary Nancy Prince provides a multitude of details about the people, culture, and history of Jamaica in a voice that is, while empathetic, fundamentally informational. She explicitly acknowledges the ethnographic (getting information to introduce someone to a people foreign to them) and the autoethnographic (seeking to engage with or disprove dominant beliefs about people) elements of her project when she tells one of her subjects "We have heard in America that you are lazy, and that emancipation has been no benefit to you. I wish to inform myself of the truth respecting you and give a true representation of you on my return."³⁵ Carla Peterson astutely analyzes Nancy Prince's movement between the "depersonalized ethnographic" voice and that of the "participant-observer" in both her pamphlet on the West Indies and her own autobiography. Through the ethnographic text, Peterson argues, Prince authorizes herself "to scrutinize the Other" while "refusing to be gazed at."³⁶ Ethnography functions as a way for Nancy Prince to control perceptions and readings of her subjectivity and authority.

Eighteenth-century slave narratives, in particular that of Olaudah Equiano, also include autoethnographic representations of people from disparate Atlantic sites.³⁷ In the section containing the most explicit and strident critique of slavery, Equiano uses an autoethnographic detailing of experiences of individual slaves and references to the experiences of the group to mount his critique. He notes, "I have often seen slaves, particularly those who were meager, in different islands, put into scales and weighed, and then sold from three pence to six pence or nine pence a pound."³⁸ He tells of the separation of families caused by these sales, and the slaves' concomitant emotions. After that relatively objective description, he confesses "oftentimes my heart has bled at these partings," expressing empathy for (connection to) the subjects. He then tells the particular story of "a poor Creole Negro," who "after having been often thus transported from island to island at last resided in Montserrat." He tells of the slave's love of fishing and the master's theft of his catch. He then sweeps back out to the general condition of slaves everywhere: "Nor was such usage as this confined to particular places or individuals, for in all the different islands in which I have been

(and I have visited no less than fifteen) the treatment of the slaves was nearly the same” (98). Equiano moves back and forth between the voice of the objective observer, the interested observer, and the potential subject, noting that he empathized with the man because he would “some time after suffer . . . in the same manner” (99).

What distinguishes Prince’s community autoethnography, however, is that hers is ethnography from the perspective of an insider who aims to speak unequivocally in the voice of the community being described. Mary Prince’s text features a person who is simultaneously a racial insider and a geographical or national or cultural outsider representing a community to which she feels profoundly connected. Martin Delany is a free Black from the Northern U.S. who seeks to describe southern Black slaves and Cubans of color. Nancy Prince writes of the Jamaicans, a group she views as less than civilized. Equiano, on the whole, maintains a significant psychological and descriptive distance from the Blacks he encounters in the Americas. All these individuals use details to construct an image of a community that has already been constructed negatively by the dominant racist and proslavery discourses. Their ethnographies have work to do, and are not simply catalogs of interesting tidbits of information about an exotic foreign culture. The character of that work differs in each text, but all have the task of counteracting the dominant negative construction, if only because should it be allowed to remain, the author, as one linked to that group, runs the risk of being tainted. The key point here is that community autoethnography is always subversive, in that the author, the presumed other, is speaking, but it is not always an expression of community and/or kinship. Prince’s narrative is both, and as such is an important exemplar of the methods by which the two arms of cosmopolitan consciousness—the cosmopolitanism and the (racial) consciousness—are linked.

Prince’s Cartography

Mary Prince’s narrative is distinctive because it simultaneously brings into focus and raises questions about the conventional geographical boundaries and frameworks for self-definition of the slave narrative. In addition, she reveals herself to be in almost constant motion during the course of her narrative, moving between houses within Brackish Pond (the town of her birth), between houses and parishes in Bermuda (her country of birth), between and within other islands in the Caribbean, and between sites in

England. As she moves among all these places, she asserts a profound Bermudian/West Indian groundedness that is evident not only in her way of speaking (as discussed by Sandra Pouchet Paquet) and the titling of her narrative (*The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave*), but also in the way she talks about space (home, “foreign,” or epistemological). Her concept of her self (regional, national, and racial) is influenced by her actual movements and evident in the very way in which she frames her narration of her movements.

As she speaks, Mary Prince also paints herself into the geographical, epistemological, and identificatory worlds about her, creating her own cartography. Cartography here signifies the making of a conceptual map of places—whether of sites of knowledge, places in social hierarchies, the place of one region vis-à-vis another, or one’s “native place.” As an object moved from place to place and positioned wherever best suits the mapmaker, Prince’s cartography is inherently radical in its persistent mapping of the specific island of Bermuda, as well as of the world beyond Bermuda, including the West Indian region, as hers. It undercuts the plotting of her physical and (cross)cultural movements by slaveowner cartographers who presume their maps to be the absolute. In this sense, she refuses to be dislocated. I term Prince’s mapping “cosmopolitan slave cartography” to reflect the outward looking concern, the anticolonial rebellion, and the geographical concern that inhere in her published articulation of selfhood. Hers is an implicitly resistant cartography, that “back-answers” discourses that position her a slave—as an object of slaveowners’ political, economic, geographical, or legal mapmaking. Henri Lefebvre has noted that “the producers of space have always acted in accordance with a representation, while the ‘users’ passively experienced whatever was imposed upon them.”³⁹ Prince unsettles this presumed hierarchy.

Her “cosmopolitan cartography” asserts definitions of Bermudianness, West Indianness, and Blackness, in addition to suggesting how those definitions relate to the world beyond these islands. Prince’s map has elements in common with the European/Eurocentric maps produced by European colonial cartographers throughout the exploration and the colonial period. She has basic references to America and the West Indies that recall basic territory-only maps. She also has more detailed ethnographic descriptions that mirror Occidental maps such as Emanuel Bowen’s *An Accurate Map of the West Indies* (1747), Guiljelmo Blaeu’s *Americae Nova Tabula* (1630) and Martin Walseemuller’s *Tabula Terre Nove* (1513), which include drawings of Amerindian individuals, families, and cultural referents.⁴⁰ Prince’s mentions of the particular colonial masters of her fellow slaves (her reference to Hetty as a

French Black, for example) echo Joseph Speer's 1796 *Chart of the West Indies*, which included a listing and color coding of the Caribbean islands based on specific colonial power.⁴¹ Prince's cartography operates on a parallel conceptual plane. Maps, for colonial powers, as Walter Mignolo has detailed, were a way to further document and illustrate their control over and claim to the mapped terrain. Mary Prince elbows her way into this discourse.

The very first line of her narrative illustrates this approach and the concomitant knowledge. She says, "I was born in Brackish Pond, Bermuda, on a farm belonging to Charles Myners" (1). James Olney has keyed in on the "I was born" beginning typical of African American slave narratives, because of its affirmation of Black slave humanity and its spotlighting of the unavailability to slaves of the anticipated concomitant details about birth-date and parentage.⁴² Her specifically locating and naming the town, the island, and the very specific type of place it is immediately calls attention to the significance of place/geography in her story. The rhetorical value of the geographical origin of the slave in slave narratives has been productively analyzed by scholars such as Melvin Dixon.⁴³ Prince's specificity, however, is unusual among slave narratives, particularly among the ones that have received the most critical attention. For example, spatial referents are wholly absent from the early pages of the narrative of Cuban slave Juan Francisco Manzano. The beginning of African American Linda Brent's narrative is similarly devoid of such specific referents. Frederick Douglass, while very specific about the location of his birth in the town of Tuckahoe, does not specify his country as Prince does. This suggests that geography matters to Prince in a way that it does not appear to matter for these other slave narrators.

Prince's reference to Bermuda demonstrates a consciousness of a world beyond Bermuda. If she imagined herself as only speaking to Bermudians, she would not need to name the island. Prince's mention of her island illustrates not only her cognizance of the broader world, but further her desire to demonstrate that awareness in her public statement. That desire is borne out by the persistence of such spatial referencing and detailing throughout the narrative. For example, Prince's hemispheric concern comes across in her statement that "Mr. Darrel's son-in-law, was master of a vessel which traded to several places in America and the West Indies, and he was seldom at home long together," clearly illustrating the hemispheric understanding implicit in Prince's first sentence, that situates her geographically (1). Here she demonstrates her knowledge of the other entities that compose the broader region and continent in which her Bermuda is located, and of a major entity in the wider hemisphere.

Creole slaves born in the Caribbean, in the British West Indies in particular, would likely, because of the inter-island trade, the wars, the smallness of the islands, and, of course, the Haitian Revolution, have a cognizance of other islands besides their own.⁴⁴ Whether they came to know of these other places through other slaves who had been there, or, as in Prince's case, through knowing where the master was when he was gone so often, this broad knowledge was part of these slaves' conceptual lives. Prince's demonstrated regional knowledge suggests a cross-island cognizance that would seem to have arisen out of the West Indian islands' common tense relationship to the British crown, the constant trade between islands, and the overwhelming fear of being attacked by other colonial powers during wars.

This reference to America and places in the West Indies is more than evidence of historical fact. Prince continues her cosmopolitan cartography through her verbal marking of America and the West Indies. By mentioning them she adds two more points to her map. In addition, the matter-of-fact tone, specificity, and placement of this description of Mr. Darrel's son's trip suggest that Prince meant for this statement to perform a significant function in her narrative. The first paragraph begins with the key "Brackish Pond, Bermuda, farm" sentence and ends with the sentence referring to America and the West Indies. That she chooses to make these specific statements instead of speaking more generally, saying I was born in Bermuda, and that Mr. Darrel was always gone, somewhere, doing something, affirms not only her human (ontological) subjectivity, but also her intellectual (epistemological) subjectivity. Mary Prince, then, uses both specific geographical-local place and hemispheric-global place to pronounce her-self into public/published being.

This alternation of locational referent, between the local and the global, permeates the remainder of the narrative, reiterating her perception of it as integral to the telling and to the understanding of her story: *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*. Her gaze is both inward, at the local (Bermuda, Brackish Pond, the farm) and outward, toward the hemispheric/regional. At times Prince articulates both perspectives in the same sentence. In discussing Mr. Darrel's infidelity, she says: "He often left her, in the most distressed circumstances, to reside in other female society, at some place in the West Indies of which I have forgot the name" (1). Her valuation of place, whether global or local, is further illuminated here by her continuing use of spatial language—"reside" and "place." Furthermore, in this statement she highlights not only her involvement in the affairs of the farm, thereby wresting conceptual ownership from the White men, but also her knowledge of

West Indian (regional) geographies. She could have simply said “some place in the West Indies,” but she goes farther by indicating that she knew the name, that she had conceptual possession of the place in her use of the word “forgot.”

Her mention of America and the West Indies in itself has great significance, especially given that similar mention (that is, of other sites in the region not physically connected to the narrator’s home country) is not made in U.S. narratives. The fact that the U.S. narratives do include mentions of other states demands attentiveness to the possible impact of the size of these African Diasporan subjects’ country on their approach to articulating a cosmopolitan consciousness. One could argue, based on the ideological distance between the free and slave states during this period, that Pennsylvania is as foreign to Douglass as America and the rest of the West Indies are to Prince. Seen in that context, Prince’s reference to America is equivalent to Frederick Douglass’s reference to Pennsylvania (and his references to Canada).

The qualitative difference in the references seems to indicate a relationship more complex than equivalence. Douglass refers to Canada in terms of its status as a place where African Americans could be free from the shackles of slavery. He mentions Pennsylvania in the same way. He mentions Canada within the context of recalling the escape plot hatched by him and his fellow slaves. At that time, he notes, they were not even aware of Canada. Prince, in the sentence under discussion here, does not mention America and the West Indies as sites where she might find freedom. She names them in a rather nonchalant fashion, without explicitly imbuing them with significance for herself. They are simply, as she presents them, part of her world. The difference in size between the U.S. and Bermuda would seem almost to mandate differing approaches to conceptualizing and engaging the world beyond, though. The total area of Bermuda is only 21 square miles. The United States, although still growing, was already hundreds of times larger when Douglass published his narrative (Florida was added as a state that very year).⁴⁵ The smallness of her island (and by extension the lack of a solid infrastructure) made it impossible for her to imagine an audience consisting only of Bermudians, for her to limit her conception of the world to just Bermuda.

Cosmopolitanism had to be part of Prince’s worldview. Karen Fog Olwig explicates the global vision that seems to inhere in Afro-Caribbean island culture, specifically the culture and identity of the Caribbean island of Nevis.⁴⁶ Her point is not that such a global vision is always present in the Caribbean, or always absent in larger countries, but rather that there is a

remarkable prevalence of it in the island region. Kathleen Wilson, in a similar vein, argues that England's islandness has long been pivotal to the English sense of self. She refers to Churchill's and later Thatcher's use of the phrase "the island race" as descendants of "a conception of national identity that eighteenth-century Britons would have recognized."⁴⁷ Prince's island origins undoubtedly had an effect on her relationship to other places, as did her historical and political context. There were debates still circulating about whether White West Indians were British, so, to be sure, arguing for Black West Indians' Britishness would have been an exercise in futility.⁴⁸ Wilson encapsulates this reality well in her discussion of English expansion into Africa and the South Seas, when she notes, "If white, Protestant English people living abroad were not able to claim the same liberties as English people at home, what hope was there for the other, proliferating ranks of people under British rule."⁴⁹ Prince's focus on geography highlights the inaccessibility of national identity for her, a colonial subject.

The geography argument does not completely explain the differences between the narratives of Prince and Douglass in references to the world beyond their own.⁵⁰ The differences between their relationships to their place of origin, their definitions of home (the place to which they belong), and by extension their visions of the most effective path to freedom within their contexts also play a part. Frederick Douglass, as is especially evident in his later writings, was in pursuit of the recognition of his and other African Americans' claim to U.S. citizenship, and by extension equality. Prince, however, does not express any interest in being or becoming British, or in defining herself solely through Bermuda. She focuses on geography, race, and culture as bases for identity and community.

The power differential between the U.S. and the smaller western Atlantic places must also be considered. The Bermudians, as residents of a geographically as well as economically and politically small place, had to be conscious of their much more imposing neighbor. Among other reasons, they needed the U.S. for trade, to bolster their economic status.⁵¹ The U.S., and by extension, U.S. Blacks, by virtue of the country's relative power, did not need to think about Bermuda at all. So although, as the narratives of both Douglass and Prince show, geography, in particular the envisioning of places other than the one where one finds him/herself, has import for African Diasporan self and group definition and self-representation during this period, the differences between the places they choose to mention and their approaches to those references show that the relative power of their country of residence is also a factor.

Prince's Agency

In her emphasis on spatial language, Prince powerfully asserts her own agency, her own right to determine where and why she moves. The difference in title between her narrative and the other extant West Indian narrative from this period further highlights the emphasis on agency in Prince's narrative. Whereas the aforementioned Jamaican apprentice James Williams's narrative centers the (ostensible) slaveowner in the title: "Narrative of the Cruel Treatment of James Williams, a Negro Apprentice in Jamaica . . . till the Purchase of His Freedom in 1837 by Joseph Sturge, Esq. of Birmingham, by Whom He Was Brought to England," Prince's narrative centers her voice, providing "The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related By Herself."⁵² (The uniqueness of Prince's move may be even clearer if we think of her as countering the obscuring of agency in the discourse Pratt describes as "anti-conquest"—"imperial eyes [that] passively look out and possess."⁵³) Her taking ownership of her own movements, of the world about her, in the face of being owned by others, comes across in her characterization of her move to Turks Island. She names it as a displacement forced by her master, but then reclaims it as serving her own purposes: "At length he [her master] put me on board a sloop, and to my great joy sent me away to Turk's Island" (9). Here Prince refuses to surrender the whole sentence—to yield all the subjectivity surrounding trip to the master. She resists erasing her opinion and emotion from the narration of this movement. There are two subjects here—the master who puts her on board the sloop, and Prince herself, who feels great joy. In structuring the description this way, Prince recenters herself by refusing to present her master as the only one whose opinions and emotions matter.

In addition to positioning herself as an emoting agent, Prince also presents movement (displacement in particular) as a cause of estrangement. Prince's approach here, I would argue, subverts/undercuts traditional notions of cosmopolitanism as a leisure activity born of and/or producing joy. Although Prince is certainly a cosmopolite, she is a cosmopolite who is subject to and subjected by others. Her "great joy" about going to Turks Island is tempered by the fact that she "was not permitted to see [her] mother or father, or poor sisters and brothers, to say good by, though going away to a strange land, and might never see them again" (9). She engages in what might be labeled "rhetorical resistance" when she identifies herself as an agent of the move to Turks Island in the earlier portion of the sentence, thus shifting

the locus of spatial power to herself. Once again, though, she balances that assertion of power with a cognizance of the underlying mitigating factors. In this case, that factor is the material and emotional detachment from family the move to Turks island forces. Prince, therefore, both employs movement as a locus for her subversion of the dominant order and presents it as a cause of estrangement. Through her presentation of this move we can read not only her refusal to represent herself as purely a victim, and her demand to speak from/of her knowledge as a traveler, but also the more sobering side of her expansive cosmopolitanism—her recognition that movement/displacement creates alienation.

Prince continually alternates between asserting her own agency and calling attention to the impositions of slave owners. In doing so, she discourages the perception of her self, life and narrative as exceptional, and, simultaneously and conversely, as an example of the fact that slaves' lives were not so bad.⁵⁴ In fact, as she ends the narrative she complains that the English believe the White West Indians

who deceive them, and say slaves are happy. I say, Not so. How can slaves be happy when they have the halter round their neck and the whip upon their back? and are disgraced and thought no more of than beasts?—and are separated from their mothers, and husbands, and children, and sisters, just as cattle are sold and separated? (22–23)

Her anger here is clear. This statement also reads like a delayed table of contents for the narrative, with each phrase referring to an event she detailed in her history, from the beating of her friend Hetty (whip upon their back) to her own displacements (separated from their mothers, and husbands, and children, and sisters). She reiterates that she is both a speaking subject and an oppressed object. Through her presentation of space we can read not only her refusal to represent herself as purely a victim, and her demand to speak from/of her knowledge as a traveler, but also her sense that migration to a place she deigns unfamiliar and/or foreign creates alienation.

In commenting on her experience on Turk's Island, Prince plays to English readers' moral consciousness: "Work—work—work— Oh that Turk's Island was a horrible place! The people in England, I am sure, have never found out what is carried on there. Cruel, horrible place" (11). Here she exhibits a level of cosmopolitanism, a level of knowledge about England, a place that is at once outside the West Indies (geographically) and profoundly part of the region (culturally, economically). Although the purposeful provoking of the guilt and shame of the "good whites" (English in

this case, U.S. northerners in others) is a common trope of slave narratives, Prince's use of specific spatial language—Turks Island, horrible place, distinguishes her employment of the trope.⁵⁵ Prince's play on English guilt, shame, and self-image is skillfully furthered by her siting of the horror in the place/the geography/land itself—it is Turks Island that was a horrible place. Her use of geography/place works to minimize any reflex defensiveness on the part of English or West Indian abolitionists that her criticism of slavery in the West Indies might provoke. What is also evident here is Prince's familiarity with the "mother country," a particularly figured cosmopolitan consciousness. She toys with English pride in a fashion reminiscent of post-1843 *Narrative* Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown. She subtly urges the English to live up to their own moral and national ideals, while also soothing their moral conscience by pleading their ignorance.

Prince's knowledge of and interest in the world beyond Bermuda is again evident in her response to hearing that one of the slaveowners was going to Antigua: "I felt a great wish to go there, and I went to Mr. D—and asked him to let me go in Mr. Wood's service" (14). This sentence indicates not only her knowledge of places outside those she has traveled to physically, but also her determination to chart her own paths despite her owner. She also demonstrates this determination in her discussion of how she came to be in England: "About this time my master and mistress were going to England . . . and they took me with them. . . . I was willing to come to England; I thought that by going there I should probably get cured of my rheumatism" (18). Here again we see Prince's inversion of displacement and insertion of herself as an agent in her movement. She says she was willing to go to England, insisting on the unquestionable significance of her own volition in the move, and goes even farther by specifying why she was willing to go. In doing so she reiterates the import of her will in determining the map she makes with her body as she moves from place to place. That she anticipates being relieved of her rheumatism seems to indicate a cognizance of either the English climate or medical advancements. A knowledge of either "back-answers" the belief in slave ignorance with slave cosmopolitanism.

Juxtaposed with this determined cosmopolitanism, though, is a sense of ambivalence about foreign or unfamiliar places. When Prince is kicked out of the house by her master and mistress, she expresses her feeling of utter isolation in this foreign country: "I was a stranger, and did not know one door in the street from another, and was unwilling to go away" (19). Significantly, even in this expression of despair, her resistant cartography surfaces. It is revealing that she chooses to use spatial language instead of

saying "I did not know anyone." What we see here is Prince's spatial orientation, her affinity for spatial language that distinguishes her from some of the best-known slave narrators. Her refusal to leave is also significant because it again emphasizes the role of her will in determining the course of events. Also evident, though, are the limits of her cosmopolitanism, her desire to cling to familiar places.

Prince's "Native Place(s)" and Strange Places

Bermuda

Prince never embraces any site other than Bermuda as home. She maintains a psychological connection to Bermuda throughout the narrative. Although she was happy to go to Turks Island because it was an opportunity to escape from her harsh master, in retrospect, she expresses her anger at "going away to a strange land" without being permitted to say goodbye to her family (9).⁵⁶ Her definition of home appears early in the narrative to be very locationally specific. When Prince is hired out by her first mistress, Mrs. Williams, to a lady who lives five miles away, she characterizes the new place as utterly strange: "a strange house" where she finds herself among "strange people." She is displaced a second time when Mrs. Williams dies and she returns (to the Williamses') home to be sold. It is at this point that her love of this particular home place becomes especially clear: "When I left my dear little brothers and the house in which I had been brought up, I thought my heart would burst" (4). For Prince, home is the place where her family is. This conceptualization in and of itself is not particularly strange or different. What is important here is how she defines home as she moves, her attitude toward balancing here and home, the place she is and her "native place," while also adjusting her notion of collective.

Prince calls the place she is taken to her "new home," but implies a distinction between this place where she must live and the place she feels connected to. When she arrives at her "new home" two slave women ask her whom she belongs to and she replies "I am come to live here" (5). Because she has been clear in previous episodes about her sense of home, and particular in her use of the words, this answer implies that she does not consider this place home. Her response also, once again, situates Prince at the pivotal center of any discourse about her movement. The agency is in this way wrested away from her owners.

At several points in the narrative Prince speaks of yearning to return to

her “native place.” After working on Turks Island for ten years she is able to return to Bermuda because her master decides to retire to his house there. She is overjoyed: “I was joyful, for I was sick, sick of Turk’s Island, and my heart yearned to see my native place again, my mother, and my kindred.” She clings to Bermuda as her home despite moving from place to place. Again, it is clear that her definition of home is intimately tied to where her family is. Unlike Olaudah Equiano, who comes to claim England as home—as the place that he longs for while he is in the West Indies—Mary Prince’s definition of home is not reconfigured by her movements.⁵⁷

Despite living in Antigua for at least ten years, Prince never explicitly calls Antigua her home. She lives there, builds relationships with the Blacks there, including the man who became her husband, but never asserts a particular affinity for it. It is not her home place. In two particular instances, while she is in England, she illustrates this apparently lukewarm attitude toward Antigua. While Prince is suffering from rheumatism, her mistress continues to treat her especially horribly, and she laments “I was sorry that I had come from Antigua” (19). She is sorry not because she misses Antigua, but because of the mistreatment she suffers after she leaves. This treatment persists and Prince gets into an argument with her master in which he threatens to take her back to Antigua. She responds, “I would willingly go back, if he [you] would let me purchase my own freedom” (19). She is not interested in going to Antigua because she has a particular love for it. She ties her willingness to go there to a demand for her own freedom. Here we have verbal back-answering layered on top of spatial-cartographic back-answering. She expresses not a particular affinity for Antigua, the territorial site, but rather a special concern for her own health and freedom.

This prioritization is markedly different from that she displays upon leaving the “cruel, horrible” Turk’s Island, where she expresses both a displeasure with the place she is leaving and a bond with the “place” and her people there (12). At that stage in her displacement she still fixates on the specific territorial place that is Bermuda. Her non-claiming of Antigua, even while in England, suggests a change in her relationship to slavery, displacement, and home in the years between her leaving Turk’s Island and her living in England. She does not mention Bermuda either, at this stage. Although she still implicitly posits the West Indies as home while she is in England, she avoids reifying the specific place. Here she focuses less on claiming a particular territorial location as home, than on finding a home in freedom.

The West Indies

The idea that Prince's cartography is distinctively West Indian, perhaps distinctively West Indian woman, becomes particularly viable when it is considered alongside Mrs. Mary Seacole's preoccupation with traveling and becoming deeply involved in the affairs/wars of both American and European countries, the Crimean war being the most significant example.⁵⁸ Although their social statuses are vastly different, and although Seacole's travel narrative was published in 1857, twenty-six years after Prince's text, both Prince and Seacole exhibit a keen sense of and interest in the world outside their islands of origin, not only because of but also undergirding their travels (the root of their routes). Their works evince a concern with other places, other people, and other societies. Seacole writes "It is not my intention to dwell at any length upon the recollection of my childhood. . . . As I grew into womanhood I began to indulge that longing to travel which will never leave me while I have health and vigor" (2, 4). Although Prince is not able to chart her own journeys materially, she does so conceptually, demonstrating the "longing to travel" felt by Seacole. After Prince leaves Turks Island to return to Bermuda, she continues to be interested in news from that place, and clearly voices her interest in her published oral history, as her description quoted earlier about the Whites pulling down the place the slaves built for prayers (13). Similarly, when she describes her time in Antigua she does not simply say, I was there, I did this, and then I was taken elsewhere. Instead, she details her substantial knowledge about slave life in Antigua, gained first from observing and later from interacting with Antiguan slaves. That she watches intently enough to provide the considerable detail that she does, further illustrates her interest in knowing about other people and other places, her outwardly reaching concern.

These statements mark a notion of the Caribbean region, a sense that Antigua and Turks Island are part of her world—the world she views herself as intimately inscribed in—not just part of the wide world beyond Bermuda. She maps the Caribbean sites into her cartography of identity not just by speaking of her fellow slaves there, but by speaking of them with empathetic tone. These sites become more than just parts of her cosmopolitan cartography, of her general knowledge of the world about her, but part of the way she views her own place in the world.

The tension between Prince's marking of other Caribbean places as not-home and her detailed signaling of a connection to those same places

raises the issue of the relationship between experience and cosmopolitanism. It begs the question—is her cosmopolitan consciousness simply a result of her physical travel to these sites? Did she have to physically travel to Antigua and Turk’s Island to conceptualize them as part of her identificatory world? This question can be thought through in a variety of ways, including migration/borderlands theory (how migrants create imagined homes when they are detached from their physical home), “travel-in-dwelling” anthropology, and critical geography (the relationship between place and identity). Carole Boyce Davies’s concept of “migratory subjectivities” encourages us to read across as well as outside national boundaries and argues that spatially bounded readings of Black women’s literature miss the crux of the writing: “Black women’s writing, I am proposing, should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically, or nationally bound category of writing.”⁵⁹

This approach is helpful for thinking about Prince and about the relationship between cosmopolitan consciousness and experience because it calls for attentiveness to modes of conceptualizing identity that are not tied to living in a particular place. In fact, Davies’s methodology suggests a disjuncture between experience and cosmopolitanism. One can envision a place as part of one’s identity without physically being there, regardless whether one has one’s own memories of a place. Similarly, one can feel absolutely no connection to a place in which one lives or has visited. Davies speaks specifically about Caribbean women writers’ rewritings of home, of their connection to the Caribbean, in the face of “racial discrimination and foreign bias, Caribbean male phallicism, and American imperialism.”⁶⁰ Their connection to Caribbean identity is mediated by these factors, as their connection to Caribbean geography is mediated by their geographical detachment from the islands. Their rewritings of home/identity are grounded in displacement, in detachment from home.

James Clifford’s demand for anthropological analyses that take the subjects’ cosmopolitan engagements into account also encourages a de-reification of place, of spatial location in readings of cultures and identities, suffers from an incongruous fetishization of the physical site. He cites Christina Turner’s critique of his work’s insistence on literal travel: “It’s a mistake, she told me, to ‘insist on literal travel.’” She argues, he tells us, that doing so “begs too many questions and overly restricts the important issue of how subjects are culturally ‘located’.”⁶¹ Anthropological fieldwork is still based on going to a particular site where the subjects are, even if the subjects are conceptualized as having contacts beyond that site. Being situated in the physical place is

understood as central to identity. Both Boyce Davies and Clifford push for a disaggregation of place and identity, but, significantly, not for a complete disaggregation. The physical site remains a fundamental part of their conceptualizations of identities and cultures.

England: The Ultimate Strange Land

Prince's narrative reflects the same ambiguity evident in Davies's and Clifford's arguments. Despite the fact that she is legally free in England, she expresses no affinity for it and has no desire to remain there. She makes several statements reflecting this feeling: "I knew that I was free in England, but I did not know where to go, or how to get my living; and, therefore, I did not like to leave the house," and "I am a stranger in this country" (20). Her attitude of distance toward England, even while she is there, suggests that experience, simply living in a place, is not enough to make her feel intimately connected to a place and its people. This fact returns us to the idea that the notion of Caribbean region is especially compelling for her, and by extension that her articulation of Caribbean region is more profound than simply a chronicling of where she has been, but rather a detailing of her coming into her identity. She lives in England, but does not feel connected to it, whereas she felt connected to Antigua when she lived there, and to Turks Island when she was there, and even afterward. It is significant, though, that her expressions of distance from England relate primarily to her feeling as if she had no community there. She says forlornly that the Moravian Missionaries were "the only persons I knew in England" (20). Prince feels detached from this place (England) because she has no "people" there—no people related to her kin, blood, race, or culture. Community rather than experience, simply being somewhere, is central to her cosmopolitan consciousness. This valuation is clear in the fact that her discussions of life in Antigua and Turks Island focus on the experiences of other slaves, rather than on the experience of the individual confronting a foreign place. Her discussion of her time in England reflects the converse attitude—it is a foreign place, and she focuses on herself and her own experiences in this foreign place.

Prince verbally marks her cultural defamiliarization in England, specifically to the cultural differences between England and the West Indies and their negative effect on her. She complains

My mistress sent me into the wash-house to learn to wash in the English way. In the West Indies we wash with cold water—in England with hot. I told my mistress I was

afraid that putting my hands first into the hot water and then into the cold, would increase the pain in my limbs. The doctor had told my mistress long before I came from the West Indies, that I was a sickly body and the washing did not agree with me. But Mrs. Wood would not release me from the tub, so I was forced to do as I could. (18–19)

She is put off both physically and psychologically by the cultural disparities. I can hear echoes here of Paule Marshall's "poets in the kitchen" speaking of their defamiliarization in "this man country," as these Caribbean emigrant women called the U.S.⁶²

Despite the fact that she also never fully embraces Antigua as her home, she conceptualizes it as part of the generic West Indian region that she identifies herself with. As her detailing of her time in England progresses she uses "West Indies" more and more, and specific national (island) references less and less. She would prefer to return to any place in the West Indies, even Antigua, rather than stay in England (19). Her horrible experiences in those two sites do not prevent her from identifying them as part of her home region, but do stop her from desiring to return to them. So, for Prince, it seems that physical travel, physically residing in a place, is unnecessary for cosmopolitan consciousness. She does not have to live in either Antigua or Turks Island to consider them part of her conceptual map. She is able to separate imagining them as part of her identificatory world, and actually being there. This reading of her recollection of her time in England bolsters my earlier readings of the cosmopolitanism evident in her locating herself using a national marker indicating a consciousness of the world beyond Bermuda, her references to America and Guinea, her description and embrace of Hetty, the French Black, as well as her detailing of slave life in Antigua and Turks Island. All of this evidence illustrates that Prince's cosmopolitan consciousness and cartography are not immutably linked to experience, to the experience of visiting a place. Conceptual travel is as constitutive of her map as is physical travel.

As her attitude toward England also shows, Prince's cosmopolitanism has its limits, limits that might usefully be read as parochial, but are, perhaps, more appropriately read as a fundamental element of her cosmopolitanism. As both the earlier quotations from Said and Hannerz index, White Western cosmopolitanism, the example through which cosmopolitanism has long been defined, has always been self-centered, and often ethnocentric. Prince's cosmopolitanism, in this way, meshes with that of her context. In addition, Prince's clear demarcation of what is "my native place" implies a cognizance of what is "not my native place." Her specific references to the

strangeness of English culture, such as the washing technique, highlight her disdain for this truly strange and foreign place.⁶³ Her narrative is the textual representation of her continuing effort to demarcate the lines between home and foreign places and people.

Her representation of that effort also, however, reflects a cognizance of the danger inherent in articulating a notion of Black community that is too broad—one that might be seen as not just “uppity” but downright threatening in this moment. Prince’s narrative, like all extant American narratives of the period, does not mention Haiti or the Haitian Revolution. This non-mentioning is especially strange given her demonstrated cosmopolitan consciousness. It is not strange, though, given the context.

Through asserting her cosmopolitanism—knowledge of other places, then embracing more regionally and conceptually oriented definitions of home—Mary Prince takes epistemological and rhetorical ownership of the world about her. She claims the worlds of the farm, Brackish Pond, Bermuda, Antigua, America, the West Indies, and England as hers not simply to know, but to evaluate and to critique. Her cosmopolitan cartography is more than a mapping of sites. Through this map, she draws these locations into her epistemological world, claiming them as part of that world. Her map inheres not simply in her mention of places she has been to, but also in her articulation of views about the politics, people, history, or culture of those sites. While she is reaching out and claiming these worlds, she also asserts a clear regional rootedness and refuses to see the two as contradictory.

Her text argues that, although one can stand in and claim several places at the same time, geographical or regional rootedness and cross/transnational mobility do not coexist in a tension-free fashion, whether in an individual’s material life or her psyche. It is this complexity in Prince’s understanding and presentation of place that anticipates the concerns of Paule Marshall, Louise Bennett, and generations of “Caribbean” women writers. Marshall’s work delves further into the tensions inherent in trying to balance both roots and routes, and creates as well as posits possible recuperative cartographies. Bennett’s work emphatically asserts Jamaican roots, while not wholly discarding or escaping the way those roots are shaped and troubled by colonially imposed geographies or more “voluntary” routes. As the precursor of this twentieth-century work, Prince’s narrative resists a reading of it as simply a cataloging or reflection of the life of a slave who is bounced around from place to place, demanding instead a reading of it as a crafted, complex, but troubled text evincing the clear, fiercely assertive voice of Mary Prince, a West Indian slave. More important for this project, though, her

maintained bond to Bermuda even with her cosmopolitan perspective suggests a hierarchy that elevates her region or “native place” above others—a black binaristic worldview. It is this underlying viewpoint that anticipates many of the less discussed tensions within the abovementioned texts, as well as between individuals, texts, and ideologies of the Black Americas.