

**Uncovering Testimonies of Slavery and the Slave Trade  
in Missionary Sources: The SHADD Biographies Project and the  
CMS and MMS Archives for Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the Gambia**

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Narratives written by enslaved Africans are the most invaluable sources for historians of both the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery in Africa and the Atlantic world. Such narratives help uncover the means by which Africans came to be enslaved, the trade routes over which they were forcibly moved, and the factors that determined whether they would be held as slaves in Africa or sold into the trans-Atlantic trade. Equally importantly, these narratives elucidate the experience of enslavement, separation from family and kin, and the anguish of uncertainty in alien surroundings. Often, these very personal tales also provide insights into larger historical forces of politics and warfare, offering unique glimpses into the broader history of pre-colonial Africa. Yet these autobiographical accounts are as scarce as they are valuable. While multiple compendiums and edited volumes of slave narratives exist, most of their protagonists were born in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, we have far fewer accounts by individuals who were once free in Africa.<sup>2</sup> Philip Curtin's pioneering edited collection of slave narratives, *Africa Remembered*, contained the voices of eight enslaved Africans.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent findings have added to this number, yet the imperative of identifying and disseminating such unique sources remains a central concern of scholars of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>4</sup>

Since Curtin published *Africa Remembered* in 1967, historians have recognized missionary archives as an important repository of narrative accounts from Africans who

experienced enslavement in Africa and sale to Europeans on the African coast.<sup>5</sup> Many of these accounts were written or dictated by Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone in the years and decades after their arrival on slave vessels intercepted by the Royal Navy. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) archives hold some of the most famous narratives of enslavement in West Africa, including those of Samuel Crowther, Joseph Wright, and Ali Eisami Gazirmabe, all of which were recorded in Sierra Leone and all of which appeared in Curtin's volume.<sup>6</sup> Similarly well known are the brief biographical sketches that CMS missionary Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle wrote of his linguistic informants while composing his monumental *Polyglotta Africana* (1854).<sup>7</sup> This article suggests that while these accounts are the best-known narratives in the CMS and MMS collections and publications, they are only a fraction of the life histories recorded in these archives. Many Liberated African converts, at various points in their life, wrote accounts of their enslavement, liberation, and eventual conversion. In many other cases, missionaries also recorded accounts spoken to them. The policy of educating young Liberated Africans in missionary schools in Sierra Leone and the Gambia (where several thousand Liberated Africans were sent from Freetown), and the high level of literacy that many of these former slaves attained, means that these two African diasporic communities composed more first hand accounts of enslavement than any other region of disembarkation in the Black Atlantic.<sup>8</sup>

This article highlights accounts by Liberated Africans held in the CMS and MMS papers for the Sierra Leone, Yoruba, and Gambia missions in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Its particular focus is on Africans who experienced enslavement in Africa and were subsequently sold to Europeans on the coast and embarked on trans-Atlantic slave vessels. These documents form an important component of the ongoing *SHADD: Studies in the History of the African Diaspora* –

*Documents* project, a digital publication of the Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on Africa and its Diasporas at York University. This article catalogues both the narratives uncovered to date within these missionary archives and research strategies for uncovering more. Identifying, digitizing, transcribing, and disseminating these sources has the potential to greatly expand the number of first-hand accounts of enslavement in Africa and our understanding of the nineteenth-century slave trade. The article concludes with an index of testimonies uncovered within the CMS and MMS archives. Digitization of the original sources have been placed on the *SHADD* website ([www.tubmaninstitute.ca/the\\_shadd\\_collection](http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/the_shadd_collection)) along with transcriptions and introductory statements that place these life histories within their broader historical context.<sup>10</sup>

### Uncovering Narratives

One challenge of this project is the scale of these archives. The CMS Original Papers (CA1/O) for the Sierra Leone mission alone comprises 5,115 letters and journals written by 210 individuals between 1820 and 1880. In addition are 2,867 documents written by 86 individuals involved in the Yoruba mission from 1844 to 1880. Yet the great strength of these sources, compared to British colonial sources or travel narratives, is that Africans wrote a large percentage of the material in the archive. African mission agents wrote perhaps 30 percent of the Sierra Leone CMS archive; most of these writers were Liberated Africans who had experienced enslavement and British naval interdiction. For the Yoruba mission, 47 of the 86 authors who produced documents were Africans, including many Liberated African ‘returnees’ who travelled with the mission from Freetown. Though African authors produced only 47 percent of the individual documents in the CMS Yoruba mission archive, J.D.Y. Peel estimates that over 60

percent of journals (as opposed to short business letters) were written by African agents of the mission.<sup>11</sup>

The large number of African authors means that the prospect of uncovering life histories recorded by Africans is therefore much greater. Moreover, accounts appear a great deal in the papers of these missions since CMS mission agents were encouraged to keep daily journals. For most of the nineteenth century, agents were expected to keep journals or ‘journal extracts’ for dispatch to headquarters in London, in order to inform policy decisions and provide excerpts for publication in CMS periodicals such as the *CMS Gleaner*, *Intelligencer*, *Record*, and *Missionary Register*.<sup>12</sup> The journal extract system came into being by the 1830s and was further elaborated upon during the years when the Rev. Henry Venn was clerical secretary (1841-1873).<sup>13</sup> The prosaic quality of these journals and their sheer abundance make them rich sources for uncovering the biographies and autobiographies of former slaves.

The Methodist Missionary Society did not have the sophisticated information system of the CMS and did not require their mission agents to compose journals. The MMS archive is nevertheless an equally rich source of biographical accounts. An even greater percentage of the mission’s staff was African-born, owing to their lack of funds and European staff compared to their CMS counterparts. As we will see below, a large percentage of the Liberated African MMS missionaries and preachers – particularly those of Yoruba birth – left accounts of their enslavement in the MMS archive.

Uncovering narratives within these archives involves a level of strategy and a familiarity with the organization of the CMS and MMS material. Historians have known of some of these accounts for some time, though they have often used these sources for different purposes. Robin Law used the accounts of Samuel Crowther, James Barber, and Thomas King in order to

establish (as much as possible) a basic chronology of the fall of the Oyo Empire and the subsequent Yoruba wars.<sup>14</sup> Leo Spitzer employed the narrative of Joseph Boston May – one of the lengthiest accounts in the MMS archive – to explore experiences of assimilation and marginality of colonized people in the era of emancipation.<sup>15</sup> While scholars have previously identified and used many of these sources, they have yet to be looked at as narratives of enslavement, and among the lengthiest know narratives by Africans who experienced enslavement. Nor have these sources been digitized, transcribed, and made widely available.

In many cases, the testimonies of Liberated Africans regarding their enslavement were subsequently printed in missionary propaganda which was sold to fund the mission, though this is more the case for those associated with the CMS rather than the Wesleyan Methodists. Missionary publications can help us uncover more narratives and identify, if possible, the original manuscript.<sup>16</sup> Whenever possible, it is important to identify, digitize, and present the original document. Published accounts were often heavily edited, with details omitted. In many cases, the author was left anonymous and their accounts reduced to a few paragraphs. The SHADD website therefore includes digitization of the original manuscript documents, their transcription, as well as a copy of any known publication based on these accounts.

### Types of Testimonies

Broadly, we can identify three types of testimonies. First are brief vignettes of a life, usually one or two paragraphs, and commonly written by others. The most notable of these are Koelle's record of the backgrounds of his linguistic informants: 210 brief biographies, of whom 179 informants can be definitely identified as Liberated Africans (the others being primarily traders or sailors settled in Freetown).<sup>17</sup> But similar vignettes emerge throughout the CMS

journal extracts. Matthew Thomas Harding, a Liberated African catechist with the CMS, recorded in his journal in November 1843 how he ‘had a conversation with one of our communicants N, a native of the Moko tribe’.<sup>18</sup> The woman told Harding that:

She was twelve years old, when her father died; she said, her father left six children after his death, and she was the youngest. Two years after her father’s death, war came into their land, and took away her two sisters, also she (N) and one of her brothers, and her mother fled to the country of their mother’s relations, where they were for three years. Again, the war came, and took her brother away; she and her mother took refuge in the bush, where they were for a night and a day. Until one came from the enemies [sic] camp saw them, and caught them, and carried them to the camp. She said, her mother was killed before her eyes; upon which she was frightened, and no hopes of her life being left within her breast. But said she, the mercy of God preserved her, and through that mercy she was brought to this land of peace.<sup>19</sup>

A decade later, the CMS missionary Edward Dicker recorded a similar testimony while visiting church members in Freetown’s Pa Demba Road district.

[Dicker] called on an interesting old communicant, a Cameroon woman, she was old and decrepit, but I succeeded in holding a conversation with her through her son. She told me a little of her history, when first sold into slavery she had actually been kidnapped by her own country people while working in her farm, some of whom seeing that no one was near seized & sold her. At the time she had a husband and two or three children. After being repeatedly sold, mostly for salt, she was brought down to the coast and shipped off but in a few days was captured by an English cruiser.<sup>20</sup>

Such brief accounts appear numerous times within the CMS journals from Sierra Leone, though in this and many other cases the individual is not named.

The second type of biographical account in these archives is longer life histories Liberated Africans told to missionaries, who subsequently recorded them. Some of these can be quite substantial. Again, the most famous account is probably Ali Eisami Gazirmabe’s life history, as recorded by Koelle in his *African Native Literature* (1854).<sup>21</sup> But they also include many other Liberated Africans in conversation with missionaries, including many Africans who served as catechists and translators to the Niger Expedition and Yoruba Mission. Another related

form of second-hand account are those written by family members as a memorial to a deceased patriarch and shared with missionaries or placed in missionary publications.

Of course, the most essential accounts are by Liberated Africans writing narratives of their own histories, whether in Sierra Leone, the Gambia, or upon returning to their regions of birth. These include the famous accounts of Crowther and Wright, but also the previously unpublished or un-transcribed accounts of James Will, George Thompson, David Noah, and Joseph Boston May, among the longest unpublished accounts of enslavement in Africa. Multiple new sources of this kind have already come to light and have been uploaded to the SHADD website (see appendix).

In all of these cases, we may be looking at more than one source: namely the testimony itself, and then supplementary sources, both unpublished and published, that help us piece together aspects of individual life trajectories. In the case of David Noah, a Bassa Liberated African from present day Liberia, we have two complementary testimonies recorded in different places at different times. Noah, a CMS schoolmaster, presented his life story in a speech given at the village of Kissy in Sierra Leone in 1824.<sup>22</sup> In his speech – the script of which survives in his mission papers – he recalled how his widowed father had sent him with his elder brother, not knowing that his two relatives had conspired to sell him to a local chief. The conspirators then ‘took me to an island to a white man named John Mills to him they sold me. I had been about three weeks a slave to this white man, when it blessed God to send English men to deliver me’. Noah, who likely reached Sierra Leone around 1815, returned on a mission trip to his homeland a decade-and-a-half after his enslavement. His ‘Journal of David Noah on a Visit to His Native Country Bassa’ provides further recollections of his region of birth.<sup>23</sup> After sailing to Liberia and

travelling to Bassa territory, Noah was on his return ‘surrounded with many of my country men, I was appeared to them just as one who arose from the dead’.

For other individuals, complementary sources exist across archives. For example, the symbolic conclusion to Samuel Crowther’s narrative, contained in the Sierra Leone papers, is his journal from the Yoruba Mission that recounts his reunion with his mother, who had been enslaved alongside him but had remained in Yoruba territory.<sup>24</sup> Piecing together testimonies of Liberated African lives thus often involves tracing individuals in the missionary establishment from Freetown through their journeys elsewhere, particularly their endeavors with the Yoruba and Gambia missions.

### Circumstances of Writing

Many of these accounts were written within a few years of one another and are particularly concentrated in the late 1830s. The October 1837 edition of the *Church Missionary Record* featured a lead article on the ‘Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes.’ The article did not name the authors, but it included the account written by Samuel Crowther, as well as Liberated African catechists Thomas Harding and John Attarra.<sup>25</sup> These were among the first publications of such accounts from the pens of Liberated Africans.<sup>26</sup> These articles are also significant in that they may have influenced the Wesleyans’ decision to solicit Liberated African narratives in Sierra Leone and the Gambia in 1838 and 1839.

The narratives of Joseph Wright, James Will, Joseph Boston May, Charles Harding, and James Campbell – all Wesleyan Methodists from various Yoruba-speaking regions – are dated between October 1838 and June 1839.<sup>27</sup> This close concentration of dates suggests that converts were prompted to record their experiences, most likely for the purposes of missionary



publications in Britain. Joseph May, the first of these five men to write an account, introduced his narrative by telling how the Wesleyan missionary Thomas Dove had ‘read one of his little books to us and give two or three away he then told us that it will be very good if we can make or write something like this of our conversion or our Experience’. As May’s introductory remarks make clear, these written statements were first and foremost intended as narratives of conversion rather than narratives of enslavement and liberation. In other instances, converts wrote these accounts on their own accord, whether they felt a personal need to do so or because they thought it might be of interest to the mission and its publications. The resulting text often asserted the embrace of a new Christian identity.

These were documents written with a particular form and for a particular purpose. They were often labeled as ‘conversion statements’ rather than slave narratives, though their titles also often read simply ‘The Life of...’. These documents must, of course, be used with some caution, as Christian converts wrote them several years after the fact and likely shaped their narrative for publication for a Christian audience in Britain. Many authors interpreted the arc of their life narrative as reflecting ‘the dealings of Providence,’ as the Liberated African John Attarra described his enslavement. Josiah Yamsey, an early convert to the Anglican mission at Regent in the 1810s, was convinced of the design by which ‘God bring me out from my country people & when I live on slave ship, God send English ships & God give me favour before that Englishman’.<sup>28</sup> Joseph Bartholomew framed his life history in similarly providential ways, recounting how:

about the middle of the year 1819, I was in my native country enjoying the comforts of father & mother, & the affectionate love of brothers & sisters. From this period I must state the unhappy change – I call it on the one hand, an unhappy day, because it was the day in which I was violently turned out of my father’s house, & separated from my relations, having no hope to see one of them again in this world. Wars had been carried on in my Nufi or Nupey country about two

years unsuccessfully between Nufi & Foulahs & the Foulahs had no other employment but selling slaves. I am taught however on the other hand to call it a blessed day, which I shall never forget in my life, a day that providence had marked out for me, to set out on my journey from the land of superstition & vice, to a place where His Word is preached.<sup>29</sup>

The language here echoes and perhaps consciously copies Crowther's 1837 narrative – by this time published – which recounted 'the unhappy, but which I am now taught, in other respects, to call blessed day' on which raiders captured his town of Osogun and separated Crowther from his father. This interpretation of enslavement as a 'blessed day' would have been shared by few other slaves sold within Africa or into the Atlantic trade, but reflects a common interpretation among Liberated African narrators that both divine intervention and that of the Royal Navy brought them to Sierra Leone.

As Crowther and Bartholomew's reflections also suggest, these narratives evince a complex relationship between homeland and diaspora. Joseph May began his narrative by stating that he 'was born in Aku Country, a heathen nation, a country full of idolatry'.<sup>30</sup> May, Wright, and Will all identified themselves as Aku – a colonial Sierra Leonean term for Yoruba speakers – at the beginning of their statements, but were often critical and even derogatory toward their places of birth. This, of course, came from their own personal disapproval of 'paganism', as well as what they felt would be the expectations of the mission's publishers and their audience.

Reminiscences of homelands were also shaped by the young age at which many Liberated African narrators left their homeland. Paul Lovejoy has noted that, 'while the ability of individuals to remember is particular and specific, the corresponding aptitude of children is clouded by a partial perspective on the adult world and the politics and economics that may have accounted for their enslavement'.<sup>31</sup> Though it is not possible to establish the age at which all of our Liberated African narrators were enslaved, many of them do list the approximate age when

they were captured. Samuel Crowther stated that he was 13 at the time of his enslavement, though later scholars have suggested he was likely about 15.<sup>32</sup> John Campbell, a Yoruba Liberated African recounted ‘that he was at the age of twelve years old when War fell to his Country,’ while Joseph Boston May arrived in Sierra Leone ‘in the year 1826, when I supposed to be about nine or ten years age.’ Most of our authors therefore arrived in Freetown as adolescents, which is not surprising in that they were the most likely to become literate through missionary schooling. Nor is it surprising that some of their accounts lack specific place names, approximate dates, or a full comprehension of the political and military events that often affected their enslavement.

The ambiguities of memory and the prism of subsequent experiences are clear in the content of narratives. In some cases, though, the events recorded in these testimonies were not only remembered; some narrators researched aspects of their own history using the archival data from British records made in the suppression of the slave trade. Crowther’s narrative is notable for recording the exact number of slaves embarked on his slave ship at Lagos (187); the name of the British vessels that intercepted the slave vessel (*HMS Myrmidon* and *HMS Iphigenia*) and their captains (H.J. Leeke and Sir Robert Mends); and the dates of their capture (7 April 1822) and their arrival in Freetown (17 June 1822). All of these details are identical to the records of the Mixed Commission Court and Liberated African Department for the slave ship *Esperança Feliz* on which he was on board.<sup>33</sup> Since Crowther wrote his narrative 15 years after his enslavement – at which time he was a young adolescent – the precision of his account suggests he consulted these documents in Freetown. The clarity with which Crowther describes certain aspects of the Yoruba wars also suggests his narrative incorporated the knowledge and memories of other Oyo Liberated Africans he encountered in and around Freetown.

Peter Wilson, an Owu Liberated African, similarly ‘endeavoured to gain and collect the facts of the events... even the minutest particulars respecting his liberation from the bondage of slavery’.<sup>34</sup> Wilson was uniquely well positioned to do so, working for many years as a domestic servant to M.L. Melville Esquire, then registrar of Freetown’s Mixed Commission Court. He may therefore have gained permission to access the Court’s records to uncover details of his arrival in the colony. These details were recorded in a posthumous account written by Peter’s wife Eliza in 1860, based on what her late husband had uncovered. Published locally in the Liberated African village of Kissy, Wilson’s life history recounts in tremendous detail that he was:

a native of the Aku Tribe, born in the Town of Owu; and was early sold into slavery to Portuguese slave dealers. His country name *Lai-guan-dai*, signifying, his being deprived of his father during infancy, may in some measure have led to his so easily falling a prey into the hands of the slave hunters. By the good Providence of God, he was however rescued from the holds of a Portuguese Brig called the “Anizo” which was captured while on her destination for the Brazils, by H.M.S. Maidstone; Commodore Charles Buller, on the 26th of September 1824; and after a lengthened passage of 43 days, he, together with his fellow captives were safely landed and emancipated in the Colony, on the 8th November.

Much like Crowther, Wilson identified the slave ship (actually the *Avizo*), the circumstances of their interception at sea, and the exact date of their arrival, despite 46 years in the colony. At least some Liberated African narrators therefore consulted colonial documents in order to reconstruct the details of their improbable journeys to Sierra Leone.<sup>35</sup>

### Enslavement: Geographies and Chronologies

Most narratives recorded from Sierra Leone are from individuals born in what would later become Nigeria. There are several reasons for this. First was the scale of the movement of Liberated Africans from the coast of present-day Nigeria, at the time better known as the eastern

Bight of Benin and Western Bight of Biafra. In total, 38,360 Liberated Africans reached Sierra Leone from the Bight of Benin and 31,471 from the Bight of Biafra, embarking primarily at the ports of Lagos, Bonny, Ouidah, and Old Calabar.<sup>36</sup> The collapse of the Oyo Empire (c. 1817-1836), the ensuing Yoruba wars, and the large number of captured vessels from the Bight of Benin in the decades after 1817 also coincided with the most concerted attempts to educate Liberated Africans in mission schools. In 1816, Governor Charles MacCarthy reached an agreement with the Church Missionary Society to greatly expand the mission presence and schooling within the colony. Thereafter, emancipated youths were sent to one of a number of Liberated African villages outside of Freetown and placed in their newly-founded mission schools.<sup>37</sup> Many of the accounts we have are from those educated by the missions in this period of church-state symbiosis.

The establishment of CMS and MMS missions in Yoruba territory and the Niger also led to several forms of life histories being recorded. Interpreters and CMS ‘native agents’ travelled from Sierra Leone with the Niger Expedition and subsequent Yoruba Mission. During their travels, many told of their experience of enslavement, particularly if they were travelling through or near their place of birth.<sup>38</sup> The first of these were the testimonies of translators who accompanied the 1841 Niger Expedition. James Frederick Schön, who participated on the expedition on behalf of the CMS, wrote in his journal upon their arrival at Anya near the mouth of the Niger River, how:

Our Brass [i.e. Ijo] interpreter was peculiarly anxious that one of the large number of persons who surrounded our vessel this evening should come on board, because he thought he recognised him. Though many years had lapsed since our interpreter was sold, and the other had, in the meantime, become an old man, they instantly recognized each other; and I cannot describe the astonishment manifested by the Ibo man at seeing one whom he verily believed had long since been killed and eaten by the White People... The Interpreter then found out that Anya was the very place to which he had first been sold as a slave, and at which

he had spent nine years of his early life; and that the very person with whom he was speaking had been his doctor and nurse in a severe illness, on which account he had retained a thankful remembrance of him.<sup>39</sup>

From 1841 on, missionaries recorded the accounts of Liberated Africans who accompanied the CMS mission as it attempted to establish itself in Yoruba-speaking territory.<sup>40</sup> James Barber, a Liberated African native born in the Egba town of Ijemo, returned with the CMS mission to become native catechist at Ibadan. In 1854, Barber told the missionary Edward G. Irving the story of his enslavement and the capture of Ijemo. Irving recorded Barber's account in his 'Journal of a visit to the Ijebu country', which was subsequently published in the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*.<sup>41</sup> Irving learned that Barber 'A native of Ijemo...was taken captive at the destruction of that place, and followed his new master into the Ijebu country'. Barber was forced to serve as a slave soldier with the allied Ife, Ijebu, and refugee Oyo forces that destroyed the Egba settlements. Irving added that Barber 'was with the army which besieged Ikereku [Ikereku]' before being sold to the coast and intercepted at sea.

The influx of CMS 'native agents' into Yoruba-speaking districts led many to write their own reminiscences. Thomas King, a CMS pastor and repatriated Egba Liberated African from the town of Emere, travelled inland from Badagry to Abeokuta in early 1850 as part of the inchoate Yoruba mission.<sup>42</sup> King observed how everything he saw 'bespoke cheerfulness as well as reminding me of the pleasant sight and diversified prospect of trees and plants on which in my childhood I used to take a fond delight'. These reminders prompted King to reflect on:

The morning of that unhappy day that I was separated from my parents about the year 1825 in the beginning of November. I left home about eight o'clock for farm about three miles distance from home, in order to get some corn. My mother and elder sister, about a fortnight previous, went to Ishaga, a town about fourteen or fifteen miles distance from hence for trade... My niece and I, my sister's daughter, were the little ones that were left at home. I stayed with my father, but my niece was left to the care of her father. No sooner had I got to the farm, and just cut sufficient corn for my load, than the repeated reports of muskets at the town gate

acquainted me of my dangerous situation. All my endeavour to escape had utterly proved a failure, as I was surrounded by a number of men, who were very eager, as to whose lot my capture should fall. At last, as a kid among many chasing wolves, I was caught by one of them.

King was taken to Lagos, sold to a Havana slave trader and ‘a few days later, with heavy hearts and sad countenances, we took leave of our shores without the slightest hope of visiting it any more’. Or so the young man thought.

The Egba youth who would later be named Thomas King was likely on board the Havana slave ship *Iberia* which departed Lagos in December 1825. The Royal Navy’s interception of the vessel and its arrival in Freetown in January 1826 set in motion an improbable return. Legally emancipated by Freetown’s Mixed Commission Courts, King was subsequently educated in CMS schools and graduated from Fourah Bay Institution in 1849.<sup>43</sup> A year later, he returned to Abeokuta via Badagry, where he was improbably reunited with his mother, whom Samuel Crowther had redeemed from slavery.

For some Liberated African missionaries, pastors, and catechists, spreading the Gospel meant traversing the slave route in reverse. William Allen, a CMS pastor at Abeokuta, recorded in his journal for 9 February 1865 that he ‘started from Lagos by the river route as I could not return [to Abeokuta] by land’. Much like Thomas King before him, his familiar surroundings led him to contemplate ‘a retrospect views [sic] of former years’ and:

How I passed Lagos as a slave, not knowing where would my destination be, and what would become of me... When at Lagos for some time in the slave barracoon, I was then shipped together with several of my age in a slave ship; some months passed away in sailing here and there in order to avoid the English man of war, during which time several of my companions died only three of us survived. We afterwards fell into the hands of the man of war, and taken to Sierra Leone, where I was placed in school and taught to read and write, and all other instructions suitable for a Christian.<sup>44</sup>

His retrospective concluded with the emphatic assertion of his return to Lagos and how, '[i]n 1855 I landed again not as a slave, but as a freed man, and a teacher to my own land'.

Many of the testimonies recounted by Liberated Africans about Yorubaland – whether composed in Sierra Leone, the Gambia, or upon return to their region of birth – provide the only first-hand accounts of the revolutionary changes that swept this region of West Africa in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Several of these sources have helped historians determine the basic chronology of particular battles and campaigns in relation to the collapse of the Oyo Empire, the ascendance of the Sokoto Caliphate and the subsequent Yoruba wars. Robin Law's analysis of the chronology of the Yoruba wars draws heavily upon the details provided by Samuel Crowther, Joseph Wright, Thomas King, and James Barber (the latter as recorded by Edward George Irving).<sup>45</sup> Barber's experience as a slave soldier in the destruction of Ikereku Idan is central to this reconstruction since, 'the town, he states, was destroyed in 1826, as it was the year previously to his being liberated at Sierra Leone, which he knows to have been 1827'. Thomas King's recollection that his home town, Emere, was destroyed 'about the year 1825 in the beginning of November', is equally significant in dating the chronology of warfare in southern Yoruba-speaking regions in the 1820s.

A recently uncovered narrative by Charles Harding, a Liberated African at the Gambia, may provide the only first-hand account of the Owu War (c.1816/17-1821/22), a catalytic event in the expansion of warfare in Yoruba territories.<sup>46</sup> In his narrative, Harding recounts how he 'was born in Western Coast of Africa ockue nation particularly native owoo City... until when war come to my country... 6 or 7 years they fight day and night'. There have previously been no contemporary written accounts of the Owu War and its immediate aftermath.<sup>47</sup> Several sources written in and outside of Yorubaland between the 1830s and 1850s do derive testimonies



from eye-witnesses.<sup>48</sup> Previously, the earliest known account of the Owu War was recorded from Osifekunde, a freed slave of Ijebu origin, in Paris in 1839/40.<sup>49</sup> Charles Harding's account is therefore significant as perhaps the only first-hand account by an observer of the war and Owu's demise.<sup>50</sup>

The concentration of these narratives in what would later become Nigeria (and among Yoruba peoples in particular) means that these missionary sources contain fewer personal narratives from many regions caught up in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, such as West Central Africa. However, these sources do provide a rich corpus of narratives among Africans who were drawn from many contiguous societies and who entered the slave trade along some 300 miles of African coastline in present-day Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. Even then these narratives are not exclusively written by Liberated Africans from the Bight of Benin. Two of the lengthiest accounts come from the above-mentioned David Noah from present-day Liberia and Josiah Yamsey, who was born in the Cameroon grasslands and sold to Portuguese slave traders at the Cameroon River c.1815-16. Numerous shorter testimonies describe the ordeals of individuals from across west and central Africa, from Upper Guinea to Angola.

While these accounts are composed by individuals about their own lives, they often recount the enslavement of several others, often family members who were simultaneously captured. Many evince the gender dynamics of the African and trans-Atlantic trades, with men and boys separated from women and girls. In many instances, the male members of the family were sold into the trans-Atlantic trade while the female members were retained as slaves in African societies.<sup>51</sup> Thomas King's mother, Ije, was captured along with her family during the destruction of the Egba town of Emere in late 1825. She was sold to Ijebu and then Lagos where she remained 'in hard servitude under six or seven different owners, and would probably have

died under the same, had it not been for the arrival of the missionaries here a few years ago'. As the narratives uncovered within the CMS and MMS archives to date are written entirely by men (perhaps not surprising given the nature of missionary training and the attitudes of the mission toward women), the recorded fates of female family members provide glimpses of their own experiences of enslavement.

A number of these testimonies also describe the experience of re-enslavement, a common prospect for many Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone. Matthew Thomas Harding, a CMS catechist, recounted that he

was born in a town 6 days journey to the sea, we were seven born of one father and mother, four sons and three daughters: I was at present when my father died, after the death of my father, behold war came upon us. I only was taken away from the family by the same war into the hand of a stranger, carrying [sic] me from place to place untill to a slave vessel; but by the providence of God I was taken to Sierra Leone by the English vessel at governor Maxwell's time.<sup>52</sup>

Harding was apprenticed to Nancy Smith, a widow in the colony. Harding experienced enslavement for the second time when his master 'was enticed by her country man to go with him up to the country'. There they stayed for two months until:

the king order his 6 men to lift me up and carry me away the same night into other village, after two days the King came there and call for me and said to me now you are become one of my slave... after that he order his man to lain a strips on me he said to me now this to make you believe that I am your master, he deliver me to one of his concubine who I lives 6 years, not openly but secretly for fear of the strangers that comes there often from Sierra Leone.

Harding was eventually redeemed from slavery by a Sierra Leonean trader, with charges brought against his former master for her complicity in his re-enslavement.

Liberated Africans also faced re-enslavement in their journeys beyond Sierra Leone. James Gerber, a Liberated African who lived 15 years in Sierra Leone, returned to Badagry in 1843 to become a trader. In 1848, while on a trading excursion inland to Ijaye, he was enslaved

for the second time in his life. Gerber told the CMS's John Christian Müller how he 'was taken, with many other Egbas, to a town called Ibatang [Ibadan], and sold there'.<sup>53</sup> The treatment he faced meant that 'when his new master wished to sell him, there was no purchaser,' though eventually 'an Ibu man, pitying his wretched condition, bought him for six heads of cowries'. Gerber was carried through Ijebu to Lagos, where he was sold to Portuguese slave traders. Eventually, Gerber's relatives were able to intercede and ransom his freedom. Accounts such as those of James Gerber and Matthew Thomas Harding show that being a 'liberated' African was often a precarious designation and status, especially for those who sought employment outside of the Sierra Leone colony.

### Conclusion

The CMS and MMS archives contain a rich corpus of testimonies from those who experienced enslavement in Africa. Sources that we have identified within these archives form a part of the larger SSHRC-funded Studies in the History of the African Diaspora – Documents (SHADD) project. The index below provides details of the lengthiest accounts within the CMS and MMS archives written by Liberated Africans or their mission colleagues about their experiences of enslavement and liberation in Sierra Leone. The index includes the name of the individual African, the author (if different), regions of origin in Africa, probable dates of birth and enslavement, and the date and location of writing. For each of these testimonies, digitization of the original missionary sources (or its microfilm facsimile) can be found on the SHADD website ([www.tubmaninstitute.ca/the\\_shadd\\_collection](http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/the_shadd_collection)) along with transcriptions and brief introductions. Additional material will be made available as we survey the entirety of the CMS and MMS archives for Sierra Leone, the Gambia, and the Yoruba and Niger missions.

These sources are of relevance not only to scholars of the colonial and missionary histories of Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the Gambia. Together, these accounts help illuminate the experience of the slave route in West and West Central Africa. Paul Lovejoy has encouraged scholars of the slave trade to ‘place the “middle passage” in the middle’, arguing that, ‘what happened before the shipboard trauma had ramifications affecting the historical development of the African diaspora, the other side of the ‘middle’ for the enslaved’.<sup>54</sup> Spared the vicissitudes of slavery in the Americas, the life histories of Liberated Africans recount these journeys to the coast in vivid detail. As Alison Games suggests, ‘with enough such [biographical] stories, we might piece the Atlantic together in new, richly detailed, complex ways, putting people in the middle of a chaotic kaleidoscope of movement’.<sup>55</sup>

### **Acknowledgements**

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**Index: Autobiographical and Biographical Accounts for the CMS and MMS Sierra Leone and Yoruba Missions** (NB: this list is far from exhaustive. It presents the longest testimonies of named individuals within these archives. In many cases, there are among the longest previously unpublished accounts of enslavement in Africa)

<b>Life History:</b> William Allen	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Egba	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of enslavement:</b>	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Igbein
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 9 February 1865	<b>Words</b> <sup>56</sup> : 237
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Yoruba Mission CA2/O18/18	
<b>Published:</b>	

<b>Life History:</b> John Attarra	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> [likely western] Yoruba	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> c.1816-1819	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Hastings, Sierra Leone; Wellington, Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 3 March 1837; 1845	<b>Words:</b> ~582, ~2082
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Sierra Leone Mission CA1/O33/3 and CA1/O33/4 <sup>57</sup>	
<b>Published:</b> ‘Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes’, <i>Church Missionary Record</i> , No. 10, Vol. VIII, October 1837; ‘A Liberated African's Account of His Slavery, and Subsequent Course’, <i>Church Missionary Gleaner</i> , No.2, Vol.VI, February 1846, 16-18 and No.3, Vol.VI, March 1846, 27-28.	

<b>Life History:</b> James Barber	<b>Author (if different):</b> Edward George Irving
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Ijemo, Egba	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> 1826	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Abeokuta
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 16 December 1854	<b>Words:</b> ~578
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Yoruba Mission CA2/O52/18	
<b>Published:</b> Church Missionary Intelligencer, Vol. VII, 1856, 65-120	

<b>Life History:</b> Joseph Bartholomew	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Nupe	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> 1819	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Charlotte, Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 25 September 1849	<b>Words:</b> ~225
<b>Archive and Reference:</b>	
<b>Published:</b> CMS Sierra Leone Mission CA1/O35/29	

<b>Life History:</b> Samuel Ajayi Crowther	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Osogun, Oyo	<b>Date of Birth:</b> c.1806
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> 1821	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Fourah Bay, Sierra Leone

<b>Date of Writing:</b> 22 February 1837	<b>Words:</b> 4566
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Sierra Leone Mission CA1/O79/2	
<b>Published:</b> ‘Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes’, <i>Church Missionary Record</i> , No. 10, Vol. VIII, October 1837; James Frederick Schön and Samuel Crowther, <i>Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther who, with the Sanction of Her Majesty’s Government, Accompanied the Expedition Up the Niger, in 1841, in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society</i> , London: Hatchard and Son, 1842; Crowther, <i>A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language (Part I)</i> , London, 1843.	

<b>Life History:</b> John Campbell	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Yoruba	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of Enslavement:</b>	<b>Place of Writing:</b> St. Mary's Island, the Gambia
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 20 May 1839	<b>Words:</b> 975, 926
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> MMS, Sierra Leone Correspondence, fiche box 25, box no. 280, ‘Sierra Leone Odds papers’, fiche no. 1880 and 1884, #7 and #30.	
<b>Published:</b>	

<b>Life History:</b> Ali Eisami Gazirmabe	<b>Author (if different):</b> Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Gazir, Bornu	<b>Date of Birth:</b> c.1787
<b>Year of Enslavement:</b> c.1810	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Freetown, Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 1848-1850	<b>Words:</b> ~3134
<b>Archive and Reference</b> <sup>58</sup> :	
<b>Published:</b> S.W. Koelle. <i>African Native Literature: or proverbs, tales, fables &amp; historical fragments in the Kanuri or Bornu language</i> . London: Church Missionary House, 1854.	

<b>Life History:</b> James Gerber	<b>Author (if different):</b> John Christian Müller
<b>Region of Birth:</b>	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of Enslavement:</b> (re-enslaved) 1848	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Abeokuta
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 1 January 1849 <sup>59</sup>	<b>Words:</b> 820
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Yoruba Mission CA2/O72/8	
<b>Published:</b> ‘The Sufferings and Deliverance of James Gerber, A Twice-Liberated African’, <i>Church Missionary Gleaner</i> , 1850-51, Vol. 1., 20-23.	

<b>Life History:</b> Charles Harding	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Owu, Yoruba	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> 1822 or before	<b>Place of Writing:</b> St. Mary's Island, the Gambia

<b>Date of Writing:</b> 15 April 1839	<b>Words:</b> ~862
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> MMS, Sierra Leone Correspondence, fiche box 25, box no. 280, 'Sierra Leone Odds papers', fiche no. 1880, #6	
<b>Published:</b>	

<b>Life History:</b> Matthew Thomas Harding	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Unknown	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of Enslavement:</b> Unknown (c.1810-1815)	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Gloucester, Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 1 March 1837	<b>Words:</b> 836
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Sierra Leone Mission CA1/O112/12	
<b>Published:</b> 'Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes', <i>Church Missionary Record</i> , No. 10, Vol. VIII, October 1837.	

<b>Life History:</b> Thomas King	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Emere, Egba	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> c.1825	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Igbein
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 7 April 1850	<b>Words:</b> ~1477
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Yoruba Mission CA2/O61/36	
<b>Published:</b> 'How Thomas King Became a Slave', <i>Church Missionary Gleaner</i> , May 1851, 138-141.	

<b>Life History:</b> Joseph Boston May	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Iware, southeastern Oyo	<b>Date of Birth:</b> c.1817
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> 1825	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> October 1838	<b>Words:</b>
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> MMS, Sierra Leone Correspondence, fiche box 25, box no. 280, 'Sierra Leone Odds papers', fiche no. 1879, #3	
<b>Published</b> <sup>60</sup> :	

<b>Life History:</b> Peter Nicholls	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b>	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of enslavement:</b>	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 1839	<b>Words:</b> ~288
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> Sierra Leone Correspondence, fiche box 25, box no. 280, fiche no. 1871, #25	
<b>Published:</b>	

<b>Life History:</b> David Noah	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Bassa (present-day Liberia)	<b>Date of Birth:</b>
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> c.1815 <sup>61</sup>	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Kissy, Sierra Leone

<b>Date of Writing:</b> 1824	<b>Words:</b> 651
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Sierra Leone Mission CA1/O165/3	
<b>Published:</b>	

<b>Life History:</b> George Thompson	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Yoruba	<b>Date of Birth:</b> c.1804
<b>Year of Enslavement:</b> c.1822-23	<b>Place of Writing:</b>
<b>Date of Writing:</b>	<b>Words:</b> 2624
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> MMS, Sierra Leone Correspondence, Fiche box 25, Box no. 280, 'Sierra Leone Odds papers', fiche no. 1884-1885, #34	
<b>Published:</b>	

<b>Life History:</b> James Will	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Yoruba	<b>Date of Birth:</b> c.1821
<b>Year of enslavement:</b> c.1829-1830	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Freetown, Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 9 March 1839	<b>Words:</b> 6043
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> MMS, Special Series, Biographical, Various Papers, Anti-Slavery Papers 1774-1891, fiche Box 44, box 662(1); and Special Series, Biographical, West Africa, fiche box 4, box no. 593(1), fiche no. 123.	
<b>Published</b> <sup>62</sup> :	

<b>Life History:</b> Peter Wilson	<b>Author (if different):</b> Eliza Wilson (his wife)
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Owu, Yoruba	<b>Date of Birth:</b> c.1811
<b>Year of Enslavement:</b> c.1824	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Kissy, Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 1860	<b>Words:</b> 1737
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Sierra Leone Mission CA1/O6/53	
<b>Published:</b> Published locally.	

<b>Life History:</b> Joseph Wright	<b>Author (if different):</b>
<b>Region of Birth:</b> (Likely Oba), Egba Alake	<b>Date of Birth:</b> c.1810
<b>Year of Enslavement:</b> late 1826 or early 1827	<b>Place of Writing:</b> St. Mary's Gambia; Sierra Leone [?]
<b>Date of Writing:</b> June 1839	<b>Words:</b> 659; 3918
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> MMS, Sierra Leone Correspondence, fiche box 25, box no. 280, fiche no. 1868 and 1869, #12 and #13 <sup>63</sup>	
<b>Published:</b> John Beechman, <i>Ashantee and the Gold Coast</i> (London: 1841)	

<b>Life History:</b> Josiah Yamsey	<b>Author (if different):</b> William Augustin Bernard Johnson
<b>Region of Birth:</b> Cameroon grasslands	<b>Date of Birth:</b> c.1800



<b>Year of enslavement:</b> c.1815-16	<b>Place of Writing:</b> Regent, Sierra Leone
<b>Date of Writing:</b> 24 March 1820	<b>Words:</b> ~2960
<b>Archive and Reference:</b> CMS Sierra Leone Mission CA1/O126/121	
<b>Published:</b> ‘Account of a Liberated Negro: Illustrative of the Oppressive Influence of the Slave Trade’, in <i>Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East, Twenty-First Year, 1820-1821</i> , (London: R.Watts, 1821), 236-241.	

<sup>1</sup> John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., *The Slave’s Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> On the importance of the distinction between narratives composed by individuals who had once been free in Africa and those who were born into slavery in the Americas, see Paul Lovejoy, ‘“Freedom Narratives” of Transatlantic Slavery’, *Slavery & Abolition* 32.1 (March 2011): 91-107.

<sup>3</sup> Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the recent work of Sandra E. Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, and Martin Klein, eds., *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2013); Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener, 2001); Paul Lovejoy, ‘Biography as Source Material: Towards a Biographical Archive of Enslaved Africans’, in *Source Material for Studying the Slave Trade and the African Diaspora*, ed. Robin Law, 119-140 (Sterling: Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Sterling, 1997). In addition to autobiographical and biographical accounts, scholars of the Black Atlantic are now reconstructing life histories and microhistories from a range of sources. See, for example, Randy J. Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); João José Reis, Flávio dos Santos Gomes, and Marcus J.M. de Carvalho, *O Alufá Rufino: Tráfico, escravidão e liberdade no Atlântico Negro (c.1822-c.1853)* (São Paulo: Companhia Das Letras, 2010); James Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); João José Reis, *Divining Slavery and Freedom: The Story of Domingos Sodré, an African Priest in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Henry Lovejoy, *Slavery, Freedom and Empire: Juan Nepomuceno Prieto of the Lucumí Nation in Cuba during the Age of Revolutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Edward A. Alpers, ‘The Story of Swema: Female Vulnerability in Nineteenth-Century East Africa’, in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, eds. Claire Robertson and Martin A. Klein, 185-219 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1993); Sandra E. Greene, ‘Christian missionaries on record: Documenting slavery and the slave trade from the late fifteenth to the early nineteenth century’, in *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade: Vol 2: Essays on Sources and Methods*, eds. Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, and Martin Klein, 50-73 (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> The society was known in the nineteenth century as the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS). On the Methodist Union of 1932, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), United Methodist Missionary Society (UMMS) and the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society (PMMS) merged to form the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS). This paper refers to the MMS since it is references the archive and contents therein, which are today referred to as the Methodist Missionary Society Archive.

<sup>7</sup> Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana: or a comparative vocabulary of nearly three hundred words and phrases in more than one hundred distinct African languages* (London: Church Missionary House, 1854); P.E.H. Hair, ‘The Enslavement of Koelle’s Informants’, *Journal of African History* 6.2 (1965): 193-203. See also Christopher Fyfe, ‘Four Sierra Leone Recaptives’, *Journal of African History* 2:1 (1961): 77-85.

<sup>8</sup> On the policy of transferring Liberated Africans from Sierra Leone to the Gambia, see Richard Anderson ‘The Diaspora of Sierra Leone’s Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and “Liberation” at Freetown, 1808-1863’, *African Economic History*, 41 (2013): 103-140.

<sup>9</sup> The Church Missionary Society Archive (hereafter CMS) held at the University of Birmingham is organized by geographic region and time period. This study draws upon the CMS original papers for Sierra Leone (CA1/O) written between 1803 and 1880, and the Yoruba Mission (CA2/O) from 1844 to 1880. These consist of letters and journal extracts of missionaries, catechists, and school masters and mistresses which are arranged by individual. The Methodist Missionary Society (hereafter MMS) archive is held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. The material can be consulted on microfiche copy only. The archive consists of correspondence and synod minutes sent to London, organized by mission field and date. This study also draws upon the correspondence and synod minutes for the WMMS Sierra Leone (from 1811) and Gambia (from 1821) missions (in some years combined as West Africa), as well as special series such as the MMS ‘biographical’ papers and ‘Anti-slavery papers and miscellaneous’ collection. Since the MMS archive is available at many research libraries on microfiche, all citations in this paper specify fiche and fiche box numbers. As the SHADD Project continues, we will be incorporating additional sources from the CMS and MMS archives, including testimonies within the papers for the CMS Niger Mission (CA3/O) with records dating to 1857 and the Methodist mission among the Yoruba.

<sup>10</sup> *SHADD: Studies in the History of the African Diaspora – Documents*, is a publication of the Harriet Tubman Institute and the Canada Research Chair in African Diaspora History. The SHADD project is a collaborative venture funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and includes a team of researchers consisting of Jane Landers (Vanderbilt), Suzanne Schwarz (Worcester), Sean Kelley (Essex), Femi Kolapo (Guelph), Olatunji Ojo (Brock), Neilson Bezerra (Rio de Janeiro), and Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec (Sherbrooke). *SHADD* publishes manuscripts in Arabic, French, Portuguese, English, Spanish and other languages relevant to the history of the African diaspora. The Series is named in honor of Mary Add Shadd (Cary), feminist and abolitionist editor of the *Provincial Freeman* (Windsor, Toronto, Chatham, Canada West), 1853-57. The SHADD website is a precursor of a website to be developed that will host the many biographies that have been recovered and transcribed, including the ones mentioned in this article. Close to 400 transcribed biographies are now online, which will eventually have scanned PDF copies of the original documentation as well as metadata to make it possible to search the database. It is anticipated that the site will probably have close to 1,000 biographical accounts from primary documentation. The current collection is accessible on the Tubman website at: <http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/shadd>

<sup>11</sup> J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 9. Fyfe notes that it was the rule from the start that every CMS missionary send home regular journals to the parent committee, a practice that began with the discouraging accounts of Melchior Renner and Peter Hartwig among the Susu in the early nineteenth century. Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 94-95, citing *CMS Report 1804*, 317.

<sup>13</sup> Journals were kept beforehand and published in the annual reports of the CMS, most famously in the case of W.A.B. Johnson’s accounts of Regent. However, the practice of sending regular journal extracts only appeared at this later date. The documents that exist within the archive today are journal ‘extracts,’ likely copied from actual journals, though the exact conditions of production are not known and the original journals are not extant. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 9. Johnson’s papers were edited and published by Robert B. Seeley, ed., *A Memoir of the Rev. W.A.B. Johnson, Missionary of the Church Missionary Society, in Regent’s Town, Sierra Leone, Africa* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853).

<sup>14</sup> Robin Law, ‘The Chronology of the Yoruba Wars of the Early Nineteenth Century: A Reconsideration,’ *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 2 (1970): 211-222; Law, ‘The Owu War in Yoruba History,’ *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 7.1 (1973): 142-143. Robert Smith was the first to uncover King’s narrative. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London: Methuen, 1969), 150, 205 no.50.

<sup>15</sup> Leo Spitzer, *Lives in Between: Assimilation and Marginality in Austria, Brazil, and West Africa, 1780-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 40-72.

<sup>16</sup> The annual roster of CMS mission agents, which often recorded place of birth, provide complementary information on individuals. *Register of Missionaries (clerical, lay, & female), and Native Clergy, from 1804-1904* (Church Missionary Society: Printed for private circulation, 1905).

<sup>17</sup> Hair, ‘Enslavement of Koelle’s Informants’, 193.

<sup>18</sup> The term ‘Moko’ had various meanings throughout the era of the slave trade. Michael Mullin argues that in British America, ‘Moco’ referred broadly to people from the Bight of Biafra hinterland, particularly the Yako and Ekoi of the Cross River. Northrup argues that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the people known as Moko were Ibibio-speakers who were wholly or partially associated with the Anang. Koelle stated in 1854 that the people known as Moko in Sierra Leone were ‘natives’ of sixteen ‘tribes’ belonging to two linguistic sub-groups. Michael

Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 30-31, 287; David Northrup, 'New Light from Old Sources: Pre-Colonial References to the Anang Ibibio', *Ikenga Journal of African Studies*, 2.1 (January 1973): 4; Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana*, 11-13.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Thomas Harding, Journal Extracts for Quarter Ending Dec. 25, 1843, CA1/O112/15. Published as 'A Liberated African's Account of Her Capture', *Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. 12, no. 4, December 1844.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Dicker, Journal for 7 March 1854, CA1/O88/13.

<sup>21</sup> S.W. Koelle, *African Native Literature, or Proverbs, Tales, Fables, & Historical Fragments in the Kanuri or Bornu Language, to which Are Added a Translation of the Above and a Kanuri-English Vocabulary*, (London: Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, 1854).

<sup>22</sup> David Noah, 'Speech at Anniversary of Kissy Church Missionary Association 1824', CA1/O165/3.

<sup>23</sup> David Noah, 'Journal of David Noah on a visit to his native country, Bassa', February-March 1829, CA1/O165/19.

<sup>24</sup> Published as 'Meeting of the Rev. Samuel Crowther with His Mother', *Church Missionary Gleaner*, Vol. VII, No. 6, June 1847, 63-65.

<sup>25</sup> 'Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes', *Church Missionary Record*, vol. VIII, No. 10, October 1837, 217-26. Crowther's narrative is easily recognizable and corresponds to his written account of 22 February 1837. The article listed the other two unidentified authors as CMS catechists whose accounts were dated March 1 and March 3, 1837. The first of these is the account of Matthew Thomas Harding, written in a letter of that date. Matthew Thomas Harding, Letter to Mission, 1 March 1837, CA1/O112/12. The second of these is from John Attarra in his letter of 3 March 1837, CA1/O33/3.

<sup>26</sup> The earliest known published testimony of a Liberated African is W.A.B. Johnson's recording of the life history of Josiah Yamsey. Published in 1821 it did not receive the same attention as Crowther's later account. See 'Account of a Liberated Negro: Illustrative of the Oppressive Influence of the Slave Trade', in *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East, Twenty-First Year, 1820-1821* (London: R. Watts, 1821), 236-241.

<sup>27</sup> It was at this time that the first Liberated Africans began returning to the coastal Bight of Benin, as traders who purchased captured slave vessels and proceeded to Badagry, Lagos, and Ouidah. This emerging bi-lateral connection, which was soon to prompt the CMS and MMS to instigate missions to the region, may have also been an impetus for writing a narrative.

<sup>28</sup> W.A.B. Johnson, 24 March 1820, CA1/O126/121; Published in 1821 as 'Account of a Liberated Negro', 236-241.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Bartholomew, Journal Extracts for Quarter Ending Sept. 25, 1849, CA1/O35/29.

<sup>30</sup> 'The Life and Experience of Joseph Boston May', October 1838, MMS, Sierra Leone Correspondence, fiche box 25, box no. 280, 'Sierra Leone Odds papers', fiche no. 1879, #3.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Lovejoy, 'The Children of Slavery – the Transatlantic Phase', *Slavery & Abolition* 27.2 (August 2006): 208. See also Olatunji Ojo 'Child Slaves in Pre-Colonial Nigeria', *Slavery & Abolition* 33.3 (September 2012): 417-434.

<sup>32</sup> According to the account in 'Bishop Crowther: His Life and Work', *Church Missionary Gleaner* 5 (1878): 10-11, Crowther was eleven at the time of his enslavement. Also see 'A Liberated African's Account of his Slavery, and Subsequent Course', *Church Missionary Gleaner* 6 (1846): 16-18; and Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1842). Later scholars have held that Crowther was 15 at the time of his enslavement; see Jean Herskovits Koypoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The "Sierra Leonians" in Yoruba, 1830 - 1890* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 285; and Ajayi, 'Samuel Ajayi Crowther', in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, 289.

<sup>33</sup> Sierra Leone Slave Trade Commission, Minute Book, Anglo-Portuguese Mixed Commission Court, 18 June, 1822, British National Archives, FO315/22. Case of the *Esperança Feliz*, 24 July 1822, FO 84/16.

<sup>34</sup> Eliza Wilson, 'A Brief Memoir of the Late Peter Wilson', 1860, CA1/O6/53.

<sup>35</sup> The *Avizo* was a Bahian slave vessel whose crew purchased 467 slaves at Badagry. Wilson's identification of *H.M.S. Maidstone* under Charles Bullen (rather than Buller) corresponds with the register of the Sierra Leone Slave Trade Commission, FO 315/31. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find a registered Liberated African whose recorded name is phonetically similar to 'Lai-guan-dai' despite the narrative specifying that Wilson provides.

<sup>36</sup> For the calculation of these estimates see Richard Anderson, 'Recaptives: Community and Identity in Colonial Sierra Leone, 1808-1863' (PhD diss., Yale University, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Maeve Ryan, "'A most promising field for future usefulness": The Church Missionary Society and the Liberated Africans of Sierra Leone', in *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. William Mulligan and Maurice Bric, 37-58 (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> The ability of many Liberated Africans to return perhaps explains why this corpus of narratives usually contains more on their lives prior to enslavement when compared to narratives from North America and the British Caribbean, which ‘tend to focus on slaves’ lives in the Americas, effacing former experiences of bondage within Africa’. Jerome S. Handler, ‘Survivors of the Middle Passage: Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in British America,’ *Slavery and Abolition* 23.1 (2002): 25–56.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Horrible Notions of the Africans Respecting the Slave-Trade’, *Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1842, Vol. 2, 51-52. Also see Schön and Crowther, *Journals*, 143-45, 355.

<sup>40</sup> With the advent of the Yoruba and Niger Missions, other forms of testimonies began to emerge, namely those of Africans held as slaves, pawns, or other positions of servility who were often drawn to the mission due to their vulnerability. Though these Africans had not experienced sale into the European-led oceanic trade, the circumstances of their enslavement often mirrored those who had. While this paper focuses on the accounts of Liberated Africans who had embarked on trans-oceanic vessels, the larger SHADD project will include these multiple forms of slave testimony from within West Africa.

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Edward George Irving, ‘Journal of a visit to the Ijebu country in the Months of December, 1854 and January 1855’ (CA2/O52/18) published in *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, vol. vii, 1856.

<sup>42</sup> King had been an earlier participant in the Niger Expedition during 1841-42 before returning to Freetown as a native pastor.

<sup>43</sup> Koypstoff, *Preface to Modern Nigeria*, 291.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Journal of William Allen, Igbein, 1865’, CA2/O18/18.

<sup>45</sup> Robin Law, ‘Chronology of Yoruba Wars’, 211-222; Law, ‘The Owu War,’ 141-147; Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600-c. 1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

<sup>46</sup> MMS, Sierra Leone Correspondence, fiche box 25, box no. 280, ‘Sierra Leone Odds papers’, fiche no. 1880, #6.

<sup>47</sup> Law, ‘The Owu War’, 142.

<sup>48</sup> This include Dr. E. G Irving’s ‘Journal of a Visit to the Ijebu Country in the Months of December 1854 and January 1855’, CA2/052/18; and John Raban, *A Vocabulary of the Eyo, or Aku*, Vol. III, (London: CMS Bookshop 1832), 10.

<sup>49</sup> Marie Armand Pascal d’Avezac-Macaya, ‘Notice sur le Pays et le Peuple des Yébous en Afrique’, in *Mémoires de la Société Ethnologique*, 2.2 (1845), 37; Translated and annotated in Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, 247.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Wilson, a Liberated African who was also from Owu, recorded a narrative of his life which was published posthumously by his wife. This account is also included in the SHADD collection. However, Wilson did not describe any aspects of the Owu war or his enslavement. ‘A Brief Memoir of the Late Peter Wilson Member of Kissy Road Church’, CA1/O6/53.

<sup>51</sup> Francine Shields has drawn upon the CMS Yoruba Mission archive to analyze the history of female slaves in the nineteenth century. Shields, ‘Those Who Remained Behind: Women Slaves in Nineteenth-century Yorubaland’, in *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy, 183-201 (London: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> Matthew Thomas Harding, Letter, Gloucester Village, 1 March 1837, CA1/O112/2. Governor Charles Maxwell served as Governor from July 1811 to July 1815, though he returned to England in July 1814 leaving in charge Charles MacCarthy, the Lieutenant-Governor at Senegal.

<sup>53</sup> John Christian Müller, 1 January 1849, CA2/O72/8. See also ‘The Sufferings and Deliverance of James Gerber, a Twice-Liberated African’, *Church Missionary Gleaner* 1 (1850-51): 20-23

<sup>54</sup> Paul Lovejoy, ‘Identifying Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora’, in Lovejoy, *Shadow of Slavery*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Alison Games, ‘Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities’, *The American Historical Review*, 111.3 (June 2006): 755.

<sup>56</sup> These word counts are approximations as these narratives are at times embedded within larger journals and letters in the mission archive. They correspond with the length of the transcriptions placed on the SHADD website and are meant to convey the length and relative detail of each account.

<sup>57</sup> John Attarra first provided a short account of his enslavement in a 3 March 1837 letter (CA1/O33/3) which was subsequently published anonymously in ‘Narratives of Three Liberated Negroes’. Roughly eight years later he wrote a lengthier, undated account in two identical letters to mission headquarters (CA1/O33/4 and CA1/O33/5). This version of his life history was published anonymously in two parts as ‘A Liberated African’s Account of His Slavery, and Subsequent Course’, *Church Missionary Gleaner*, No.2, Vol. VI, February 1846, 16-18 and No.3, Vol. VI, March 1846, 27-28.

<sup>58</sup> A shorter account, written by Ali Eisami and translated by Koelle, is recorded in the latter’s half yearly report dated 28 March 1848, CA1/O135/12.

<sup>59</sup> This account is of James Gerber's re-enslavement after he returned from Sierra Leone with the CMS mission to Badagry and began trading inland to Abeokuta and Ijaye. Gerber was a Liberated African who first reached Freetown around 1828.

<sup>60</sup> A posthumous account of May's life entitled 'A Brief Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Joseph May, Native of the Yoruba Country' was written by his eldest son, Rev. J. Claudius May, and was 'published by request' in Freetown in the 1890s. Leo Spitzer kindly provided a digitization of a copy he made at Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone in the 1960s.

<sup>61</sup> This estimate is based on Noah's account of his arrival in Sierra Leone. Noah recounted that 'we were sent to Regent's then called Hog Brook. At the first, when we were at Regent's, which was then a desert, Mr. Macaulay and one Capt. William were there, we were surrounded with nothing but bushes and we did not like to stop there but we were forced to do so. I believe we were at Regent's a whole year without a white man.' This description suggests Noah was an early inhabitant of this Liberated African village (founded in 1812) and arrived about a year prior to the CMS taking over superintendence of the villages in 1816.

<sup>62</sup> William Fox provides a short account of Will's life history based on a speech Will gave at the Wesleyan chapel on Jewin Street in south London, while visiting the capital with the missionary Henry Badger in 1848. Fox misidentifies James Will as Joseph Will though the other elements of his life that Fox presents from his speech – including the role of the missionaries Crosby and Wise in his conversion – are identical. William Fox, *A Brief History of the Wesleyan Missions on the West Coast of Africa* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1851), 594-595.

<sup>63</sup> Though Joseph Wright's account is well known (having appeared in Curtin's *Africa Remembered*), we have uncovered a second, shorter narrative that recounts different information regarding Wright's enslavement. This second account was written at St. Mary's Island, the Gambia.