THE PRICE OF FREEDOM… FROM SLAVERY TO CONVERSION. WOMEN IN THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY FROM 1840 TO 1891.

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ABSTRACT

The price of freedom… from slavery to conversion. Women in the Church Missionary Society from 1840 to 1891.

This dissertation examines the profound transformations in nineteenth-century West Africa, a period shaped by the suppression of the transatlantic slave trade, the expansion of British imperial authority, and the growth of Christian missionary efforts overseas. After the 1807 British 'abolition' of the slave trade, thousands of formerly enslaved Africans were brought to Freetown, which emerged as a centre for administration and missionary work. Under the Church Missionary Society (CMS), these "Liberated Africans" underwent systems of apprenticeship, religious education, and social regulation that modified existing coercive structures rather than eradicating them. From this foundation, missionary activities spread to the Bight of Benin in the 1840s, including places such as Badagry and Lagos, as well as inland areas like Abeokuta and Ibadan, demonstrating the circulation of people, ideas, and institutions across both Atlantic and regional networks.

Focusing on African women, this research employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates archival research, microhistorical analysis, and visual interpretation. Drawing primarily on CMS archival records, missionary correspondence, periodicals, and visual materials, it reconstructs women's life stories while critically addressing the silences and biases present in male-authored sources. Through case studies, the dissertation traces the journeys of women who, although often born free in the Bight of Benin, experienced slavery through warfare, kidnapping, or displacement before being reclassified as "liberated."

The central argument of this study is that liberation did not mark a definitive rupture from coercion but instead introduced a new phase characterized by missionary discipline, conversion,

and controlled labour. In this context, women endured cycles of violence, displacement, and family fragmentation while developing strategies for survival and participation. Conversion to Christianity served not only as a means of moral regulation but also as a contested space where women negotiated agency, mobility, and social belonging. Women contributed to missionary efforts as wives, schoolmistresses, catechists, communicants, and informal missionaries, playing essential roles in sustaining mission communities. Their involvement in education, trade, and farming helped spread cultural practices and fostered new forms of belonging, including an emerging sense of Yoruba peoplehood. By highlighting these experiences, the study demonstrates that women were active agents in shaping both missionary institutions and broader social transformations in nineteenth-century West Africa.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on African individuals, particularly women, and the profound costs they endured in the process of obtaining freedom during the nineteenth century. Many of those whose lives are examined here were born free in the Bight of Benin (specifically what missionaries called Yoruba country), yet through kidnapping, warfare, or displacement, they experienced enslavement before eventually being classified as "liberated" in other territories. The majority of these individuals were disembarked in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where liberation from slave ships did not mark the end of coercion, but rather the beginning of a new phase shaped by Christian conversion, apprenticeship, and missionary discipline under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

During the nineteenth century, the Church Missionary Society played a central role in the expansion of Anglican Christianity across several overseas territories within the British Empire. Missionary activity was closely linked to imperial infrastructures that facilitated the circulation of people, ideas, and institutions between Britain, Africa, and other colonial regions. In West Africa, Freetown emerged as a crucial missionary and administrative centre. Following the passage of the 1807 *Slave Trade Act*, which abolished the British slave trade and authorized the Royal Navy to intercept slave ships, thousands of Africans were transported to Sierra Leone from 1808 onward. There, individuals designated as "Liberated Africans" were subjected to systems of apprenticeship and moral instruction, in which conversion to Christianity formed a central component.

Education and evangelization were inseparable within this framework. Mission schools functioned alongside churches as key sites for religious instruction, linguistic training, and the

inculcation of values associated with Christian domesticity and discipline. These institutions shaped a cohort of African converts who would later play significant roles in the expansion of CMS missions beyond Sierra Leone. The structures developed in Freetown, including schooling, clerical training, and domestic organization, were subsequently replicated in missionary ventures to the interior of the Bight of Benin, often staffed by African clergy educated in Sierra Leone and, in some cases, in England.

The establishment of the Yoruba Mission was led by European missionaries in collaboration with African converts who either chose or were assigned to return to their regions of origin. These movements included not only male clergy, but also their wives and children, whose presence was integral to the missionary enterprise. Departing from Freetown in November 1842, the first group of missionaries arrived in Badagry in December of that year and proceeded inland to Abeokuta in January 1843. Lagos would later become another important center of missionary activity. These journeys unfolded over different periods and under varying leadership, reflecting both institutional planning and individual initiatives, including independent efforts by Africans seeking to return to their lands.

Drawing on CMS periodicals and visual materials, this dissertation addresses several interrelated questions: What paths did women follow before attaining their freedom? What forms of violence, displacement, and separation did they endure, and under what conditions were family reunifications made possible? How did conversion to Christianity function not merely as a mechanism of moral regulation, but also as a contested space through which women negotiated agency, social belonging, and geographic mobility? The study begins by situating CMS missionary activity within the broader historical context of abolition and Christian expansion in West Africa. It then presents a series of case studies that illuminate the lived experiences of

women whose lives were shaped by enslavement, liberation, conversion, and missionary engagement. By examining women's life trajectories through both textual and visual sources, this research demonstrates that conversion did not necessarily entail abandoning prior identities. Instead, conversions, whether in childhood or adulthood, produced distinct experiences and outcomes. This study reveals the pressures women faced within missionary regimes, the relationships they forged, and the crucial roles they played in sustaining and shaping missionary communities. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of freedom, conversion, and gender in nineteenth-century West African missionary history. In the process of spreading Christianity in West Africa, women found opportunities and created spaces for autonomy and agency. In a world dominated by male missionaries and their narratives, women found spaces where they could play active roles in missions in Freetown, the Bight of Benin, and along the Niger River.

As there are few written records by women in the 19th century, the Church Missionary Society's records provide glimpses of women and, hence, a window into their impact on the political landscape. I argue that women's influence extends far beyond their immediate environments and workplaces. They developed effective ways to adapt to the changes introduced by Christian missions while maintaining their traditions. They used the education system to empower girls and influence future generations. Women moved to places like Lagos, Badagry, and Abeokuta to pursue further education at girls' schools and the Female Institute. As adults, they participated in economic activities such as farming and trading. All these socioeconomic activities also helped spread cultural values and practices in the community, including a shared Yoruba identity, which, as an ethnic form of belonging, challenged existing political loyalties. At that time, there was no unified Yoruba state, language, or religion; people identified as Egba,

Ijebu, Oyo, or Egbado. This transition began before colonial rule, with Britain gradually imposing regulations after taking control of Lagos in 1861, thereby fostering the concept of a Yoruba state, which was disseminated in missionary accounts and CMS newspapers.

Within this framework, women were essential to missions, supporting their male missionary partners as wives and taking on various other roles. They served as catechists, schoolmistresses, communicants, and students, often as 'unrecognized' missionaries. As wives, they provided vital support in helping their husbands reach more communities and people. As mothers, their main responsibility was to educate children to become good Christians and encourage them to marry within the faith. Schoolmistresses and catechists expanded this influence by training and educating people of all ages to embrace Christianity, often through school or institute programs. Girls' schools taught reading, writing, religion, math, and science, along with sewing, cooking, and social protocol; they aimed to instill virtues that would help girls become good daughters, wives, and mothers. These practical skills were seen as marks of 'civilization' in Western and Christian perspectives. Women also supported churches and schools as catechists, missionaries, and communicants, providing aid to the sick and inspiring converts to continue evangelizing. By examining their life stories and representations within the CMS, we gain insight into their activities, identities, and origins. Their impact extended beyond the CMS, influencing missionary work and their home communities. The experiences of girls and women, especially those liberated from slavery and converted, reveal how they reconstructed their lives, including reunions with family members and how some saw conversion as a path to salvation, sometimes motivated by the belief that it would save their souls, as sons often told their mothers, particularly if they had converted earlier.

Review of literature:

This literature review draws on scholarship concerning the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the return migration of "Liberated Africans," and Yoruba history. It examines how Christian missions, abolition, and social transformation unfolded within the interconnected worlds of West Africa and the Atlantic. Focusing on studies of Sierra Leone, the Bahia of Benin, and the West African interior, it highlights the ways in which warfare, jihad, enslavement, mobility, and urbanization reshaped labour patterns, gender relations, and forms of unfreedom, while simultaneously enabling the emergence of Christian communities in the nineteenth century. When read critically, missionary archives emerge not only as vital sources for understanding African voices and lived experiences but also as institutional manifestations of colonial power, which must be contextualized within the interplay of imperial, Islamic, and local political economies.

Several scholars have used CMS records to reconstruct West African history. Early Nigerian historians, in particular, were deeply engaged with mission archives, and their work became associated with the founding of the "Ibadan school," alongside the development of the University of Ibadan as the first Nigerian university. This prestigious cohort, including J. F. A. Ajayi, Adiele Afigbo, E. A. Ayandele, and O. Ikime, focused primarily on political history, the promotion of Nigerian nationalism, and the forging of a Nigerian identity through publicizing the achievements of precolonial history. Methodologically, they drew not only on missionary materials but also on oral history and interdisciplinary approaches.[1] While they successfully

[1] J. F. A. Ajayi, "Henry Venn and the Policy of Development," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1, no. 4 (1959): 331-42. J. F. A. Ajayi, "The Development of Secondary Grammar School Education in Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 4 (1963): 517-535. J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Longman, 1965). J. F. A. Ajayi, and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1964). J. F. A. Ajayi, "Historical Education in Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 8, no. 1 (1975): 3-8. E. A. Ayandele, "An Assessment of James Johnson and His Place in Nigerian History, 1874-1917, Part II, 1890-1917," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 1 (1964):

shifted the focus of historical research away from British and European history toward Nigerian history and African history more generally, they paid less attention to the contradictions of the colonial project as they appeared in social history, women's lives, gender relations, and class differences.[2] Relatedly, this early scholarship often lacked sustained engagement with the daily, local, and short run contexts in which interactions in African missions unfolded in precolonial Nigeria.[3] Even so, Ajayi's work remains among the most authoritative accounts of the relationship between the rise of a new Nigerian elite and the undertakings of various Christian missions.[4]

Since the publication of Africa Remembered, historians have increasingly identified and used missionary archives as key sources for African narratives that reveal enslavement within Africa and across the Atlantic world.[5] The CMS archives, in particular, preserve some of the most significant narratives of enslavement in West Africa, including those of Samuel Crowther, Joseph Wright, and Ali Eisami Gazirmabe. All were recorded in Sierra Leone, and all appeared in Curtin's research. This turns toward African voices rooted in missionary collections, which laid the groundwork for later scholarship that treats CMS materials not only as missionary records but also as archives of African experience, mobility, and memory.

Building on this archival terrain, subsequent researchers, including Femi Kolapo, Olantunji Ojo, Bronwell Everill, David Northrup, Richard Anderson, and Katrina Keefer, have

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73-101. E. A. Ayandele, "An Assessment of James Johnson and His Place in Nigerian History, 1874-1917, Part I, 1874-1890," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 4 (1963): 486-516. E. A. Ayandele, T*he Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (Longman, 1966). Obaro Ikime, "Reconsidering Indirect Rule: The Nigerian Example," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 3 (1968): 421-38. A.E. Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs. Indirect rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929 (Longman, 1972).

[2] Paul E. Lovejoy, "Nigeria: The Ibadan School and Its Critics," in *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* edited by Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (Sage Publications, 1986).

[3] Femi Kolapo, "Anglicanism in West Africa," in *Oxford History of Anglicanism 5*, ed. William Sachs (Oxford University Press 2018), 124-147.

[4] Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*.

[5] Philip D. Curtin, ed. *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of Slave Trade* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1967).

used CMS sources for distinct analytical purposes. Kolapo's work on missionaries of African origin at the Niger- Benue confluence between 1858 and 1880 is especially important for highlighting how mission encounters varied across precolonial settings. He argues that relations between missions and Africans in Gbebe and Lokoja differed from those in other precolonial mission towns: although missionary practice often conflicted with converts' interests, that conflict was not the defining character of the relationship.[6] Kolapo also intervenes historiographically by observing that earlier scholarship often overemphasized the religious dimension of missionary presence, while ideological conflict and local relationships received comparatively less attention.[7]

This emphasis on everyday social relations also appears, in different ways, in the work of Ojo and Anderson. Ojo examines the nexus of kinship, commerce, and credit by analyzing how ethnicity, age, and gender shaped credit operations.[8] Anderson, by contrast, analyzes testimonies of enslaved people through missionary sources, focusing on Africans who were sold to Europeans on the coast after enslavement and then embarked on transatlantic slave vessels.[9] Read together, these studies underscore that missionary archives illuminate not only conversion and doctrine, but also the social infrastructures, credit relations, kinship strategies, and coercive processes through which people navigated changing regimes of labour and unfreedom.

Where Kolapo, Ojo, and Anderson foreground local relationships, Bronwell Everill and David Northrup situate missionary records within broader geographies of imperial expansion,

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[6] Femi Kolapo, "CMS Missionaries of African Origin and Extra-religious Encounters at the Niger-Benue Confluence, 1858-1880," *African Studies Review* 43 no. 2 (2000): 87-115.
[7] Kolapo, "Anglicanism in West Africa," 124-147.
[8] Olatunji Ojo, "Èmú" (Àmúyá): The Yoruba Institution of Panyarring or Seizure for Debt," *African Economic History* no. 35 (2007): 31-58.
[9] Richard Anderson, "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," *Slavery & Abolition* 38, no. 3 (2017): 620-44, https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2016.1223709. Richard Anderson, Recaptives: Community and Identity in Colonial Sierra Leone 1808-1863 (PhD diss., Yale University, 2015).

resettlement, and return migration. Everill's study of "Liberated African" missionaries as "bridgeheads of the empire" compares experiences of missionary expansion in Nigeria and Cameroon.[10] She argues that Sierra Leoneans participated in diverse evangelical and commercial activities along the West African coast, many of which did not lead to British annexation.[11] Everill further shows that there was no single pattern of activity developed by the "new Christian evangelists," nor a uniform relationship with either colonial administrations or metropolitan government. "Liberated African" missionaries operated in both missionary and imperial fields, often producing similar outcomes, including conversion, the introduction of European norms, English-language literacy, and the expansion of trade. At the same time, Everill emphasizes that missionaries were not consistently "bridgeheads," and they did not always bring imperial control.

Northrup likewise examines the production of Christian, English-speaking, literate communities by tracing how African identities in Sierra Leone evolved alongside two interconnected developments. First, he analyzes the gradual integration of "Liberated Africans" into the pre-existing Creole society of Freetown, Sierra Leone, rather than into larger African communities. Second, he traces the return of some "Liberated Africans" to Yoruba-speaking homelands in southwestern Nigeria. That return produced a range of outcomes, including partial reintegration into ancestral communities, missionary led efforts to convert "countrymen," cultural changes associated with creolization, the early articulation of a pan Yoruba identity in the homeland, and the struggles of individuals who attempted to negotiate a middle ground.[12] Northrup argues that the interaction between African ethnolinguistic nationalism and Western

[10] Bronwen Everill, "Bridgeheads of Empire? Liberated African Missionaries in West Africa," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 5 (2012): 789-805, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2012.730833.
[11] Everill, "Bridgeheads of Empire," 789.
[12] David Northrup, "Identity among Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone," in *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade,* ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs and James Sidbury (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 23.

influence was not confined to the Yoruba, as similar processes later emerged among Igbo speakers in eastern Nigeria as they embraced Christianity. In a more localized Igbo context, Misty L. Bastian contends that CMS schooling and conversion in Onitsha depended on gendered body and mind disciplines that helped constitute *ndi kris*, a distinct, youthful Christian category of personhood within Igbo society. Bastian also cautions that "Young Igbo women's experience of mission modernity, for instance, may have freed them from the surveillance and control of patrilineage mates, but it did not free them from surveillance and control more generally."[13]

Keefer's work returns to early CMS Sierra Leone but shifts the emphasis to biography and the social production of missions through African actors. Like Northrup, Keefer analyzes missionaries involved in the CMS in early nineteenth-century Sierra Leone; however, she focuses on West African missionary accounts to reconstruct their biographical trajectories, limitations, and contributions. Keefer argues that these first CMS missionaries had a profound and complex impact on the region, especially through schools and missions that provided education to an expanding recaptive population during the earliest period of colonial Sierra Leone. As she emphasizes, "The spread of Christianity in West Africa was shaped to a considerable degree by the actions and effects of these earliest missionaries and their decisions, especially concerning education in Sierra Leone."[14] Importantly, these early missionaries were neither British nor German, though they operated within a British missionary society. As teachers and mentors, they transformed students' lives, and through conversion and schooling, those students went on to found additional schools, disseminating the values and practices they had learned.

[13] Misty L. Bastian, "Young Converts: Christian Missions, Gender and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria 1880-1929," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2000): 145–58, https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2000.0001., 54.
[14] Katrina Keefer, "The First Missionaries of The Church Missionary Society in Sierra Leone, 1804–1816: A Biographical Approach," *History in Africa* 44 (2017): 231.

More recent work by Femi J. Kolapo further sharpens these debates by emphasizing both African led agency and the structural limits of missionary projects in Central Nigeria. Kolapo argues that Christian missionary engagement in Central Nigeria, 1857 to 1891,[15] particularly through Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther's Upper Niger Mission, constituted an exceptional experiment in African led indigenous agency rather than a straightforward extension of European missionary control. The mission relied heavily on African agents, many of them formerly enslaved recaptives from Sierra Leone, whose linguistic skills and cultural knowledge allowed them to mediate Christianity in locally meaningful ways that European missionaries often could not. At the same time, Kolapo emphasizes the constraints of this experiment. Operating within the Nupe Emirate of the Sokoto Caliphate, a powerful Islamic polity, the mission faced significant political and religious limits. Conversion rates remained low among Muslims and among non-Muslims, while broader geopolitical instability, slave raiding, and demographic disruption inhibited the formation of a stable Christian educated elite comparable to those in Freetown or Lagos.

A particularly significant contribution of Kolapo's work is his insistence on women's centrality to the survival and success of the mission. While largely marginalized in male dominated missionary narratives, women constituted the majority of converts and formed the social and economic backbone of the church at the Niger, Benue confluence. Kolapo highlights figures such as Ayin, an enslaved woman who emerged as a principal financier of the mission between 1860 and 1861. Through church membership, women negotiated personal freedom,

[15] Femi J. Kolapo, *Christian Missionary Engagement in Central Nigeria, 1857–1891: The Church Missionary Society's All-African Mission on the Upper Niger*, African Histories and Modernities (Springer International Publishing, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31426-2.

social respectability, and new identities within a slaveholding society, demonstrating that Christianity could serve as a resource for mobility and self-fashioning.[16]

Andrew Barnes also recenters Samuel Ajayi Crowther, though through intellectual history and missiology rather than social history alone. Barnes argues that Crowther should be understood less through the lens of his tragic downfall and more as a pioneering African intellectual and missionary who fundamentally reshaped Christian evangelization in West Africa. For Barnes, Crowther's historical significance lies in his creative reworking of Anglican missiology, especially the ideas of Henry Venn, to suit African social realities. Rather than merely transmitting European Christianity, Crowther mobilized education, language, and African personnel to build Christian communities capable of surviving and competing within expanding structures of British imperial rule. Barnes, therefore, challenges interpretations that treat Crowther primarily as failed or compromised and instead presents him as a visionary architect of African Christian modernity, whose success ultimately provoked European missionary hostility and racialized backlash. Crowther's career ended when English CMS missionaries visited his bishopric to dismiss many African agents he had recruited. He resigned in protest, believing his authority was being usurped. As Barnes notes, "Crafting a persona that many later African Christian leaders emulated, Crowther endeavoured to facilitate, through Christian evangelization, the ethnogenesis of his people, the Yoruba. To use J. D. Y. Peel's phrase, Crowther was the 'proto-Yoruba,' meaning that he was the first individual to think through his Yoruba ethnicity in the universalizing language of Christianity."[17]

[16] Kolapo, *Christian Missionary Engagement*, 189-225.
[17] Andrew Barnes, "Samuel Ajayi Crowther: African and Yoruba Missionary Bishop," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (Oxford University Press), 3.

If Barnes reframes Crowther's significance within African Christian modernity, Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy widen the analytical frame by reconsidering abolition itself through the experiences of those classified as "Liberated Africans."[18] Their edited volume centers the experiences of approximately two hundred thousand individuals categorized as "Liberated Africans," arguing that emancipation functioned as a juridical and imperial reordering of unfreedom rather than a clear transition to liberty. Following the 1807 abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, Africans intercepted from illegal vessels were processed through international courts in locations such as Sierra Leone, Cuba, and Brazil, where "liberation" frequently entailed forced relocation, compulsory apprenticeship, military recruitment, and gendered dependency. The editors contend that the category of "Liberated African" itself emerged from abolitionist governance, transforming formerly enslaved people into colonial wards and labour resources whose mobility, labour, and social lives were reorganized to serve imperial interests rather than humanitarian ideals. Methodologically, the volume combines ship registers, census data, court records, and missionary documentation with digital humanities projects that recover African names, bodily descriptions, and life trajectories, thereby foregrounding African perspectives within abolitionist archives. In tracing the uneven passage from human property to colonial subject across Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, the collection reframes abolition as a contested process that generated new regimes of coercion, displacement, and social vulnerability rather than definitive freedom.

[18] Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896* (University of Rochester Press, 2020).

Melek Delgado's chapter extends this emphasis on governance by examining how colonial classification practices produced particular forms of vulnerability.[19] Delgado analyzes the classification of "children" among the earliest cohorts of "Liberated Africans" resettled in Sierra Leone between 1808 and 1819, demonstrating that childhood operated as a fluid legal and administrative category rather than a stable reflection of age or lived experience. Through a systematic analysis of the first recaptives processed in the Crown colony, Delgado shows that colonial officials applied inconsistent and often contradictory definitions of "child," shaped by labour needs, apprenticeship regimes, and imperial governance rather than by prior social status. She distinguishes between the categories of "enslaved child" and "Liberated African child," arguing that these classifications diverged and produced different legal and social outcomes. By focusing on children among the first recaptives to experience forced resettlement, the chapter reveals how colonial classification reconfigured age, dependency, and vulnerability in ways that obscured African social realities while facilitating new forms of control over liberated populations.[20]

Lovejoy's broader body of work further situates these experiences of unfreedom within the political economy of Islamic West Africa. In *Jihad and Slavery in West Africa*,[21] he argues

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[19] Erika Melek Delgado, "Liberated African "Children" in Sierra Leone: colonial classifications of "child" and "childhood," 1808-1819," in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896*, ed. Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson (University of Rochester Press, 2020).

[20] In other studies, focused on Sierra Leone, Ali analyzes records of 1,100 fugitive slaves who escaped their owners and sought freedom in Freetown, drawing on the Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves from 1874 to 1894. He investigates their identities and life experiences, arguing that Sierra Leone's slavery was more exploitative and violent than previously recognized, thereby revising earlier understandings of the abuse they endured. Myles Ali, "Here in the Queen's territory, every Man and Woman are free": Slavery and the Lives of the Enslaved in late Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone (Ph.D. thesis, York University, 2020). Meanwhile, Cóulon examines population and societal changes from the mid to late nineteenth century, focusing on migration, social and economic class divisions, family connections, and the rise of professional and business networks in Freetown. Her research draws on records such as the 1831 census, birth and death registers, and court records. Mégane Cóulon, "Demographic and social change in Freetown, Sierra Leone, c. 1819-1862" (PhD diss. University of Worcester, 2022). Both studies enhance our understanding of the population residing in or moving through Freetown during the nineteenth century.

[21] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Jihad and Slavery in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions (1780-1850)* (Ohio University Press, 2016).

that the Sokoto Caliphate, established in 1804, encompassed much of what is today northern Nigeria, southern Niger, and eastern Cameroon, and remained a dominant political entity well into the twentieth century. Lovejoy estimates that between two and four million enslaved people resided in or were moved into the Caliphate, where they were primarily employed in cotton cultivation and textile production. The scale of enslaved labor and production within the Caliphate, he argues, was comparable to plantation systems in Cuba, Brazil, and the United States, and in fact exceeded them demographically during the nineteenth century. These dynamics align with what Dale Tomich has conceptualized as the "Second Slavery,"[22] characterized by intensified exploitation, expanded production, and economic development dependent on enslaved labour. In *Slavery in the Global Diaspora of Africa*,[23] Lovejoy shifts the focus to the social and civilian costs of enslavement, emphasizing that most people were enslaved through debt, kidnapping, revenge, or as prisoners of war. Men, women, and children were forcibly displaced from their homes, while others became refugees attempting to evade capture. Lovejoy also highlights the gendered dimensions of enslavement within the Sokoto Caliphate, arguing that slavery functioned as a mechanism for recruiting women through concubinage and polygyny, practices embedded in Islamic societies of the region. After the nineteenth-century jihad movements, West Africa became more firmly integrated into an Islamic world that differed markedly from the coastal Atlantic zones shaped by European commerce. Furthermore, the collaborative digital projects, including *Freedom Narratives* by Erika Delgado and P. Lovejoy, and *Liberated Africans* by H. Lovejoy, deepen this analysis by recovering individual life histories, West African origins, occupational trajectories, kinship ties, and, in

[22] Paul E. Lovejoy and Dale Tomich. *The Atlantic and Africa: The Second Slavery and Beyond* (State University of New York Press, 2021).
[23] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Slavery in the Global Diaspora of Africa* (Routledge, 2019).

some cases, Atlantic crossings.[24] These databases and works reinforce my argument that enslavement, mobility, and survival unfolded through interconnected African and Atlantic systems rather than along a simple trajectory from captivity to freedom.

The literature on "Liberated Africans" also connects directly to Yoruba and Lagos history through the scholarship on returnees and the making of modern Nigeria. Kolapo argues that the Saro, "Liberated Africans" who returned from Sierra Leone to Yorubaland and other parts of Nigeria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, constituted a foundational social group in the making of modern Nigeria.[25] Far from being marginal returnees, the Saro functioned as Black Atlantic intermediaries: their experiences of enslavement, emancipation, Christianity, Western education, and commerce positioned them to mediate Africa's encounter with abolition, capitalism, and colonial modernity. Kolapo emphasizes African agency by showing that Saro migration was initiated by Africans themselves rather than orchestrated by missionaries or colonial authorities. The Saro played decisive roles in commerce, especially the produce trade, mission expansion, education, journalism, and colonial administration, particularly in Lagos and Abeokuta. Through their mobility, skills, and networks, they articulated early ideas of a multiethnic homeland, wage labour, and a unified economy, supporting their characterization as forerunners of Nigerian nationhood.

These missions and abolition centered debates intersect with a broader body of Yoruba historiography that provides essential context for interpreting religious change, urban transformation, and gendered social life. The Yoruba are among the largest and most historically

[24] Henry B., Lovejoy, dir., Liberated Africans http://liberatedafricans.org/. Paul E., Lovejoy, Erika Melek Delgado, dir., Freedom Narratives http://freedomnarratives.org/

[25] Femi J. Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2020) https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-762.

significant ethnolinguistic groups in West Africa, with populations concentrated in present day Nigeria, Benin, and Togo, as well as an extensive Atlantic and global diaspora. Their long and complex past has generated a substantial and diverse body of scholarship, ranging from early intellectual histories such as Samuel Johnson[26] and J. Peel to recent interdisciplinary syntheses by historians, including Toyin Falola and Aribidesi Usman, among others.

Falola and Usman[27] provide one of the most comprehensive reconstructions of Yoruba history by situating Yoruba societies within a longue durée framework that predates the consolidation of modern identities and political formations. Drawing on archaeological evidence, oral traditions, archival materials, and underutilized local histories, they reconstruct Yoruba history across three broad periods: the precolonial era of early settlement, agriculture, urbanization, and state formation; the colonial period marked by political reorganization and profound economic and cultural disruption; and the postcolonial era shaped by independence, nationalism, and transnational connections. While recognizing the pivotal roles of Ile-Ife and the Oyo Empire, their analysis foregrounds other Yoruba polities and interactions with neighbouring non-Yoruba societies, emphasizing the formation of a dynamic frontier culture rather than a singular political center. By integrating social, cultural, religious, and material histories alongside political and economic analysis, their work challenges earlier state centered or decline focused interpretations and presents Yoruba history as a complex and evolving continuum embedded in regional, Atlantic, and global processes.

[26] Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. O. Johnson (G. Routledge & Sons, 1921; repr., Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).
[27] Aribidesi Usman, and Toyin Falola. *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present, XVII-XX* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Within this historical landscape, religious change has been analyzed most influentially by J. D. Y. Peel. In *Religious Change in Yorubaland*,[28] Peel challenges explanations that attribute the spread of Christianity and Islam primarily to missionary effectiveness. Instead, he argues that conversion patterns were shaped by the internal social structures, histories, and communication networks of particular Yoruba subgroups. Displacement and migration during the nineteenth century wars created conditions in which traders, refugees, and socially mobile populations were more receptive to world religions, while more stable communities retained stronger attachments to local cults. Peel, therefore, identifies timing, social dislocation, and existing lines of interaction as decisive factors in religious transformation.

Peel develops this argument further by conceptualizing Yoruba religious history as operating across three interconnected "circles": Orisa religion in the homeland; Islam and Christianity, adopted by the majority of Yoruba people; and Orisa religion, transformed and expanded in the Atlantic diaspora. Rejecting linear narratives of decline or replacement, Peel emphasizes contingency, divergence, and relational analysis.[29] He highlights a central paradox: while Orisa religion has contracted and has been increasingly demonized in Yorubaland under the pressure of assertive Christian and Muslim reform movements, it has flourished in the Americas, attracting both African descended and non-African practitioners. Crucially, Peel argues that "Yoruba traditional religion" was never a unified or static system, but rather a constellation of locally grounded and dynamic cult complexes. The very idea of a coherent, pan-Yoruba religion, he suggests, was first constructed discursively by missionaries and later reworked by diaspora practitioners, making it, paradoxically, more fully realized outside Africa

[28] J. D. Y. Peel, "Religious Change in Yorubaland," *Africa* 37, no. 3 (1967): 292–306, https://doi.org/10.2307/1158152.
[29] J. D. Y. Peel, "The Three Circles of Yoruba Religion," in *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (University of California Press, 2016).

than within it. This framework is particularly useful for studies of lived religion, women's ritual labour, and partial or negotiated conversion, because it shifts attention away from formal affiliation toward everyday religious practice.

Scholarship on religious change also intersects directly with studies of missionary abolitionism, labour regimes, and the political economy of emancipation. Missionary engagement with slavery and labour has been examined by Ojo, whose study of the Yoruba Church Missionary Society Slavery Conference held in Lagos in March 1880 highlights the contradictions of missionary abolitionism.[30] Ojo argues that while Christian opposition to slavery existed earlier, it remained hesitant and uneven until the conference produced decisive resolutions against Christian ownership of enslaved people and pawns. Building on earlier scholarship by Jacob F. Ajayi[31] and Emmanuel Ayandele,[32] which links CMS anti-slavery efforts to British imperial ambitions and peace negotiations, Ojo situates missionary abolition within broader economic and institutional constraints. Emmanuel Oroge complicates this picture by showing how the CMS simultaneously supported military campaigns that generated captives while promoting emancipation and reforms to pawnship, a combination that made the church attractive to enslaved people and other marginalized groups.[33] Toyin Falola argues that these contradictions reveal the limits of missionary commitment to abolition.[34] Ojo, however, identifies gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the economic implications of abolition for enslavers, pawn holders, and mission institutions themselves, as well as the persistence of

[30] Olatunji Ojo, "The Yoruba Church Missionary Society Slavery Conference 1880," *African Economic History* 49, no. 1 (2021): 73–103, https://doi.org/10.1353/aeh.2021.0003.
[31] Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria.*
[32] Ayandele, *Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria.*
[33] E. A. Oroge, "The institution of slavery in Yorubaland with particular reference to the nineteenth century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ibadan, 1971).
[34] Toyin Falola, "Missionaries and domestic slavery in Yorubaland in the nineteenth century," *Journal of Religious History* 14, no. 2 (1986): 181–92.

coercive labour regimes such as apprenticeship and indenture. By foregrounding labour contracts, credit relations, and church, state interactions, Ojo opens new avenues for analyzing missionary decision-making and internal conflicts.

Economic and urban transformations in nineteenth-century Lagos further contextualize these religious and social processes, particularly because slavery was reconfigured rather than simply abolished. In *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*,[35] Kristin Mann argues that Lagos's transformation from a small coastal kingdom into a major Atlantic port and colonial capital was driven by shifting regimes of human value rather than by a straightforward transition from slavery to freedom. Situating Lagos within a West African "wealth in people" political economy, she demonstrates that the Atlantic slave trade initially expanded elite power and the enslaved population without fundamentally altering the social logic of slavery, which remained oriented toward incorporation and political support. This dynamic shifted with the mid-nineteenth-century transition to palm produce commerce, which redefined enslaved people primarily as labourers and intensified the extraction of work, producing a more coercive and exploitative system. Mann further contends that abolition in Lagos was slow, contested, and uneven, with slavery frequently reconfigured into other indigenous relationships of subordination, including marriage, pawnship, and overlordship. Methodologically, her study integrates quantitative data from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database with close readings of court cases, land and probate records, African produced archives, oral traditions, and slave narratives, reconstructing slavery and emancipation as lived and negotiated processes that shaped the social, economic, and political foundations of colonial Lagos.

[35] Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Indiana University Press, 2007).

Olukoju[36] complements this emphasis on transformation by arguing that nineteenth-century Lagos was reshaped from a small lagoon settlement and slave port into the leading commercial and political hub of British West Africa through the interaction of local dynamics and external forces, rather than through colonial intervention alone. He shows that abolition, warfare, migration, Christianity, and indigenous political struggles collectively shaped Lagos's emergence as a colonial city. Lagos's nineteenth-century history divides into two phases: a pre-1861 period marked by dynastic conflict, refugee influx, and slave trading, and a post-1861 colonial period characterized by administrative consolidation and economic expansion. Lagos also became the center of a new African professional and commercial elite, notably Saro and Aguda, whose activities underpinned early nationalism, a vibrant press, and the city's role as the "Liverpool of West Africa." Christianity and Islam expanded alongside indigenous religion: Christian missions played a central role in education and elite formation, while Islam spread through trade, kinship, and cultural compatibility.

Through a collective biography of indigenous entrepreneurs, Anthony Hopkins illustrates how Saro and Muslim mercantile elites navigated imperial shocks, colonial policies, and global markets. They mobilized private wealth to foster economic diversification and urban growth. His research challenges the idea of African commercial decline by highlighting indigenous agency and institutional innovation within the context of British free trade and the civilizing mission. Hopkins offers a framework for understanding Lagos's urban history and capitalist development from 1851 to 1931, emphasizing the role of African merchants in shifting from the slave trade to "legitimate" commerce. Figures like the husband of Sarah Bonetta, involved in building

[36] Ayodeji Olukoju, "Lagos in the 19th Century," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2019) https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-281.

infrastructure for the mission in Lagos (churches and schools), or Richard Blaize, born and educated at CMS in Freetown before moving to Lagos to establish newspapers like The Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser, exemplify the influence of educated CMS affiliates in Lagos's economic and infrastructural development.[37]

Complementing this economic history with a methodological shift, Ademide Adelusi Adeluyi's *Imagine Lagos* offers a spatial history of the city between 1845 and 1872, arguing that urban space itself functions as an archive where written records are fragmentary or silent.[38] By analyzing street names, neighbourhood layouts, and spatial practices, Adelusi Adeluyi recovers histories of enslavement, religious change, and everyday life that escape the traditional archive. Street names reveal the persistence of Orisa worship alongside Christianity, the memory of slavery, both domestic and transatlantic, and the social and economic centrality of women. Although the 1868 street naming scheme was overwhelmingly masculine, the inclusion of several women provides rare evidence of female authority, economic power, and religious influence in nineteenth-century Lagos. This spatial methodology is therefore particularly valuable for recovering women's lived experiences and tracing the intersections of labour, religion, and urban life.

To situate Lagos and the reconfiguration of slavery within the wider Yoruba political economy, Robin Law's scholarship is especially instructive. Across his work on the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Yoruba world, Law demonstrates that political instability and coastal transformation were structurally produced by shifts in warfare, trade, and control over people rather than by moral decline or external intervention alone. In his study of Badagry, Law

[37] Antony G. Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies: African Merchants in Lagos, 1851-1931* (Princeton University Press, 2024).
[38] Ademide Adelusi-Adeluyi, *Imagine Lagos: Mapping History, Place, and Politics in a Nineteenth-Century African City* (Ohio University Press, 2024).

argues that the town's rise as a major slave trading port was shaped by lagoon geography and its position within competing regional power struggles involving Oyo, Dahomey, Porto Novo, and Lagos, producing a commercially flexible but politically fragile polity whose fortunes depended on fluctuating trade routes and military pressure.[39] Complementing this coastal analysis, Law's examination of the political disintegration of the Oyo kingdom challenges personalized or purely jihad centered explanations by locating Oyo's prolonged instability in structural tensions within its political system. He shows that the expansion of warfare, tribute extraction, and Atlantic slave trading during the eighteenth century generated new concentrations of wealth and followers, intensifying competition between the Alafin and the Oyo mesi over control of people, military power, and trade resources.[40] Rather than producing a decisive rebalancing of authority, these pressures weakened the capital's capacity to govern the provinces, facilitating rebellion, fragmentation, and ultimately the kingdom's collapse.

Building on Law's analysis of warfare and political instability, Paul Lovejoy further demonstrates that the Oyo Empire played a significant role in the enslavement of Muslim populations from the interior. As Lovejoy and Law show, prior to the nineteenth-century jihad movements, most enslaved people produced through Oyo's military system remained within West Africa rather than being transported to the Americas, the Caribbean, or the Middle East. In the case of states that opposed the jihad, Lovejoy argues that they were often transformed or destroyed by it, a process that reshaped regional political formations and patterns of enslavement. Lovejoy's arguments also intersect with the analysis by Law and Green, who

[39] Robin Law, "A Lagoonside Port on the Eighteenth-Century Slave Coast: The Early History of Badagri," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 28, no. 1 (1994): 32-59.
[40] Robin Law, "Making Sense of a Traditional Narrative: Political Disintegration in the Kingdom of Oyo (L'interprétation de La Tradition: La Désintégration Politique Du Royaume d'Oyo)," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 22 (1982): 387–401.

contend that the Oyo Empire was the major force in the region until its fall in 1835, and that Oyo's collapse contributed to patterns of enslavement that linked the interior to Atlantic markets, including Cuba and Brazil. Law's work on Dahomey further demonstrates the power of militarized states to expand systems of capture and trade, showing how Dahomey's conquests of Allada and Ouidah consolidated its position, alongside Oyo, as one of the most significant slave-trading states of the transatlantic era.[41]

Finally, Kristin Mann's work provides a crucial framework for understanding how gender, Christianity, abolition, and urban capitalism intersected in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Lagos. In her analysis of women's landed property,[42] Mann demonstrates that colonial capitalism and the commoditization of land did not simply marginalize Yoruba women; instead, it restructured the conditions under which women exercised economic power, as they continued to acquire, litigate, and leverage property through both customary and colonial legal regimes. At the same time, her study of Christian marriage[43] shows how missionary reforms promoted new ideals of female dependence that often undermined women's economic autonomy, even as women selectively adopted Christian respectability while relying on Yoruba kinship networks and commercial practices to protect their interests. Read alongside scholarship on CMS abolitionism and the transformation of Lagos into a colonial city, Mann's work highlights the gendered consequences of emancipation, wage labour, and moral reform: property ownership and Christian marriage became key markers of urban belonging and respectability, yet they also

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[41] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Slavery, Commerce and Production in the Sokoto Caliphate of West Africa* (Africa World Press, 2005). Paul E. Lovejoy, *Jihād and Slavery in West Africa.* Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 2019). Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, c.1600-c.1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Clarendon Press, 1977). Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving Port, 1727–1892* (Ohio University Press, 2004).
[42] Kristin Mann, Women, "Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos," *Signs*, 16, no. 4 (1991), 682-706.
[43] Kristin Mann, "The Dangers of Dependence: Christian Marriage among Elite Women in Lagos Colony, 1880-1915," *The Journal of African History* 24, no. 1 (1983), 37-56.

exposed women to new forms of vulnerability within emerging credit, labour, and legal systems. Collectively, this scholarship reframes abolition and urbanization as lived, gendered processes in which women actively negotiated religious reform, economic survival, and social authority in colonial Lagos.

This dissertation contributes to scholarship on African history, gender, and missionary studies by exploring the experiences of African women in nineteenth-century West Africa through the interconnected processes of enslavement, mobility, and conversion. It focuses on the period before colonial rule was firmly established, situating missionary expansion within the broader context of British inland expansion and regional transformation. Building on existing research about "Liberated Africans," it enriches the field by combining visual materials with textual sources, offering deeper insights into women's lives and paths in the Bight of Benin. Through detailed analysis, it reconstructs women's movements, relationships, and strategies across connected West African mission fields, from Sierra Leone to Yoruba and along the Niger River.

Methodological Approach and Sources

This research adopts an interdisciplinary methodological framework that combines archival research, visual analysis, and digital humanities techniques to examine how enslavement, Christian mission, gender, and social transformation were experienced and represented in nineteenth-century West Africa. Grounded in a critical reading of Church Missionary Society (CMS) records, the study seeks to reconstruct women's life trajectories and to analyze the textual and visual production through which missionary institutions documented, regulated, and, at times, made visible women's participation in mission communities.

Building on earlier scholarship that employed CMS records to reconstruct West African political and social histories, this research revisits foundational studies by scholars such as J. F. A. Ajayi, Adiele Afigbo, E. A. Ayandele, and Emmanuel Oroge by shifting the analytical focus from institutional narratives to individual experience. Through the systematic recovery of biographical fragments, testimonies, and representations of women preserved in CMS sources, the project foregrounds women not merely as auxiliaries to male missionaries, but as historical actors who negotiated conversion, education, labour, kinship, and mobility within mission contexts in Sierra Leone, Yorubaland, and along the Niger River.

At the core of the project is the construction of a relational digital database designed to trace what can be known about as many individuals as possible who appear in CMS records, with particular attention to women whose lives were shaped by enslavement, liberation, and missionary engagement. This database incorporates autobiographical testimonies and biographical data following the models developed by the *Liberated Africans* and *Freedom Narratives* projects. It records African names and aliases, places of origin, age, gender, brief physical descriptions, circumstances of enslavement, and subsequent life trajectories. While the dissertation follows the conventional structure of a doctoral thesis, its central analytical axis lies in the interrogation of this database, both as a methodological tool and as a means of identifying patterns related to displacement, family separation and reunification, conversion, and social mobility.

The research is grounded in extensive, multi-sited archival work. Its principal foundation is the Church Missionary Society Archive at the University of Birmingham, which holds mission books, individual letter books, précis books, minutes of missionary conferences, and original correspondence associated with the West Africa, Sierra Leone, Yoruba, and Niger missions.

These materials provide insight into both the administrative structures of the CMS and the everyday encounters between missionaries and African communities. This core archive is supplemented by research conducted in additional repositories in Britain, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, and Canada, including *The National Archives* at Kew, *the British Library*, *Lambeth Palace Library*, the *Samuel Crowther Library* at Oxford, the *Harriet Tubman Institute* at York University, the *National Archives of Nigeria* in Ibadan, and the *Sierra Leone Public Archives*. Together, these collections enable a multi-sited reconstruction of missionary activity, African mobility, and the circulation of people, ideas, and images across West Africa and the Atlantic world.

Published CMS materials constitute a second major body of sources. These include official proceedings, missionary atlases, registers, annual reports, and periodicals such as *Missionary Papers*, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, *The Gleaner*, and the *Gleaner Pictorial Album*. Produced for different audiences and institutional purposes, these publications functioned as instruments of fundraising, publicity, and knowledge production, while also circulating narratives and images that shaped metropolitan understandings of Africa, Christianity, slavery, and gender roles. In addition, the study draws on missionary-authored books, journals, linguistic works, and nineteenth-century missionary histories, including publications by Samuel Ajayi Crowther and his contemporaries, which provide African-authored perspectives embedded within missionary institutions.

Visual materials are treated as central historical sources rather than illustrative supplements. All images related to the Sierra Leone, Yoruba, and Niger missions published in the four CMS periodicals (*Church Missionary Papers*, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, *The Gleaner*, and the *Gleaner Pictorial Album*) were systematically identified, classified, and

catalogued. A comparative approach was adopted, analyzing images across publications and over time to identify recurring themes, representational strategies, and shifts in visual emphasis. Particular attention is given to representations of women as mothers, labourers, educators, communicants, and missionaries, as well as to the tensions between their marginal visual positioning and their substantive roles within mission life. By situating images within their publication contexts, the analysis examines how visual narratives reflected, reinforced, obscured, or contradicted textual accounts of women's agency within missionary regimes.

In parallel with archival and visual analysis, the dissertation employs digital humanities methodologies through the construction of relational databases that organize both biographical and visual data. The biographical database records information on individuals identified in CMS sources, including African names and aliases, places of origin, age, gender, brief physical descriptions, circumstances of enslavement, and subsequent life trajectories. A complementary visual database records metadata related to images, including publication date, region, mission context, subject matter, and the presence and positioning of women. Together, these datasets allow for the identification of patterns concerning where individuals came from, the conditions under which they were enslaved, and what became of them, while also supporting close qualitative analysis of individual cases.

Throughout the study, missionary and colonial archives are approached critically as both repositories of African voices and institutional products shaped by imperial, religious, and political power. Women's narratives preserved in these sources, though fragmentary and often mediated through male authorship, provide rare insights into the lived experience of enslavement, liberation, conversion, and community formation. By integrating textual, visual, and digital sources, this methodological framework connects individual women's experiences to

broader historical processes of warfare, enslavement, displacement, religious change, and mobility, as well as to larger structures of power and the reconfiguration of unfreedom in nineteenth-century West Africa. In doing so, the dissertation demonstrates how missionary archives, when read against the grain and mobilized through digital methods, can illuminate women's roles in shaping mission communities and contributing to wider social transformations, including the emergence of "Yoruba" as a historical and cultural category prior to formal colonial rule. At the same time, the open and relational nature of the database ensures that the materials assembled in this research will remain accessible to a wider community of scholars interested in "Liberated Africans," freedom narratives, and the social histories of West Africa and the Atlantic world.

CHAPTER 2. THE STUDY OF WOMEN IN PRECOLONIAL AFRICA

This chapter examines the scholarship on women in African history, with a particular focus on precolonial Africa. It is organized into three sections. The first section, The Problem of Studying Women in African History, covers the major conceptual, methodological, and archival issues that have shaped and limited scholarly research on women. The second section covers the main contributions to the study of women in African history that have redefined women as central historical actors in the history of slavery and the Atlantic world. The final section focuses on Church Missionary Society (CMS) records and biographical accounts as a means of viewing the history of women, their lived experiences, and their historical agency.

A. The Problem of Studying Women in African History

The problem with studying women in African history is not their absence from the past, but the structures of knowledge production that have marginalized, misinterpreted or overlooked their lives. Rather than facing a single obstacle, historians have demonstrated that African women have been affected by a range of connected historiographical, methodological and archival issues that have shaped the writing of African history.

As Mariana P. Candido reflects, “The first generations of Africanists focused on reclaiming and glorifying the continent’s historical past, stressing the role of states and rulers. In the process, little attention was paid to internal economic and social inequalities along gender and class lines. As a result, the role of marginalized groups, such as enslaved people and women,

remained almost invisible."[1] Early African historiography privileged topics involving political authority, state formation and formal economic systems, which were documented through the accounts of male figures such as travellers, missionaries, traders and administrative officers. These accounts tended to overlook or marginalize women in historical analysis.

This marginalization is now widely recognized as a problem in historical writing rather than a reflection of historical reality. As LaRay Denzer noted, "Obviously the main sources for the study of the history of Yoruba women are those usually consulted in the discipline: government archives at all levels, public records offices, missionary archives, court records..."[2] Women were often excluded in previous studies, not due to lack of evidence, but because historians didn't ask gendered questions. The scarcity of women in African history shows the questions asked, not the realities of African societies.

a. Conceptual, Analytical and Methodological Challenges

Early political and economic histories prioritized formal institutions, state structures and male authority. As Denzer stated, this resulted in the systematic exclusion of women, even where sources existed.[3] Throughout historical scholarship, analytical frameworks have obscured rather than highlighted women's lives. Similarly, Kristin Mann argues that, despite playing central roles in the economy and society, "Evidence about women and children is often difficult for historians to find".[4]

A persistent conceptual problem has been the uncritical application of Western gender categories to African societies, which has led to many misconceptions. Christine Saidi and Claire

[1] Mariana P. Candido, "Women and Slavery in Africa," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, ed. Thomas Spear, Oxford University Press, 2020, 11.
[2] LaRay Denzer, "Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27, no. 1 (1994): 37.
[3] Denzer, "Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study," 2, 37.
[4] Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760–1900* (Indiana University Press, 2007), 15.

C. Robertson contend that historians have frequently assumed rigid patriarchal hierarchies and binary gender divisions, misinterpreting African social systems in which authority is more decisively structured by age, seniority, lineage, marital status and reproductive capacity than by biological sex.[5] Robertson, as part of her critique, argues that rigid free/slave dichotomies obscure African realities, remarking that women's lives often existed on a spectrum between dependency and independence rather than within strict legal boundaries.[6] In this context, women could be wives, concubines, dependants, enslaved people, and property holders simultaneously.[7] This argument is crucial for understanding the experiences of women in precolonial Africa who often 'crossed boundaries' between wifehood, concubinage, enslavement, and ownership, usually unwillingly. It also highlights the limitations of applying the Atlantic chattel slavery models uncritically to African contexts.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that women constituted the majority of the enslaved population in Africa, and it was this demographic reality that shaped internal markets, gender imbalances and the flow of the external slave trade. As Candido cautions, "Recognizing their complexities and the variations regarding their enslavement and bondage is vital to avoiding the essentialization of African slavery as a monolithic or ahistorical institution."[8] For this reason, African women cannot be treated as a homogeneous category, since there are differences in ethnicity, class, age, legal status (free, enslaved or pawn) and religion, and those had a profound impact on women's experiences.

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[5] Christine Saidi, "Women in Precolonial Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2020), 2; Claire C. Robertson, "Slavery and Women in Africa: Changing Definitions, Continuing Problems," in *A Companion to African History*, eds. William H. Worger, Charles Ambler, and Nwando Achebe (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 143-145.
[6] Robertson, "Slavery and Women in Africa,"144.
[7] Robertson, "Slavery and Women in Africa," 144–146.
[8] Candido, "Women and Slavery in Africa," 1.

Marcia Wright critiques macro-structural histories that reduce women to anonymous categories. She argues that women's strategies of survival, negotiation and resistance have been overlooked because historians have prioritized large-scale processes over life histories and microhistorical evidence.[9] Also, Henrice Altink and Jessica Marie Johnson study how abolitionist and imperial discourse transformed enslaved women into moral symbols, hypersexualized victims or maternal characters, while fragmenting or silencing their everyday lives.[10]

For this reason, to address the histories of women, it is necessary to read sources carefully and to challenge preconceptions. Although many surviving sources were written by men and from a male perspective, indirect evidence about women can be found in court cases, mission registers, apprenticeship records, photographs and marriage dispute records. All of these written materials should be considered alongside oral histories, material culture and visual sources. Such an approach demands interpretive caution and theoretical rigour, but also to be creative, since women's voices are rarely explicit.

b. Gender and the Limits of Slavery Studies

The study of women's history and gender analysis is a relatively recent addition to the field of African history, emerging primarily from the 1970s onwards. Consequently, subsequent scholars have had to re-examine and revise established narratives by asking new questions, using different methodologies and critically engaging with archival sources. Paul Lovejoy argues that, despite the fact that women made up the majority of the enslaved population in many African

[9] Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (James Currey, Lilian Barber Press, 1993).
[10] Henrice Altink, *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780–1838* (Routledge, 2007), 1–9; Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 5.

regions, scholarship on slavery has tended to prioritize plantation labour and male productivity. This has marginalized domestic slavery, sexual coercion and reproduction.[11] Vanessa Oliveira and Candido further demonstrate that sexual violence against enslaved women was often trivialized or normalized, obscuring women lived experiences.[12]

Paul E. Lovejoy builds on this critique by placing enslaved people at the centre of African historical explanations. His Africa-centred approach "positions those who were enslaved at the centre of the discourse on slavery,"[13] insisting that gendered migration and captivity patterns should be analyzed through the lens of African social structures, rather than only focusing on the Atlantic labour system. Lovejoy highlights that reproduction, sexuality, and domestic labour were central to slavery's operation in Africa, rather than being marginal aspects.[14] Vanessa Oliveira builds on this by highlighting that gender is often treated as an 'add-on' rather than an organizing analytical principle, resulting in blind spots in Atlantic, Saharan, Indian Ocean and internal African systems.[15]

Furthermore, Candido argues that Studies of the history of women and gender relations in the Atlantic world are often written by non-Africanists with limited knowledge of African history. For this reason, there is little appreciation of the diversity of cultural, political and economic life on Africa's Atlantic coast, despite the publication of some important case studies about them.[16]

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[11] Paul E. Lovejoy, "Internal Markets or an Atlantic-Sahara Divide? How Women Fit into the Slave Trade of West Africa," in Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic, ed. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007), 259–261.
[12] Mariana P. Candido and Vanessa S. Oliveira, "The Status of Enslaved Women in West Central Africa, 1800–1830," *African Economic History* 49, no. 1 (2021): 127–129.
[13] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Slavery in the Global Diaspora of Africa* (Routledge, 2019), 2.
[14] Lovejoy, *Slavery in the Global Diaspora.*
[15] Vanessa S. Oliveira, "Gender and the Study of Slavery and the Slave Trades in Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2024), 1–6.
[16] Mariana P. Candido and Adam Jones, *African Women in the Atlantic World: Property, Vulnerability & Mobility, 1660–1880* (James Currey, 2019), 4.

This difference between Atlantic versus Africa-Centred Models highlights a significant historiographical debate: whether slavery should primarily be modelled through Atlantic chattel paradigms or African systems of incorporation and dependency. Lovejoy explicitly challenges Eurocentric interpretations by repositioning the enslaved within the context of African historical change. Meanwhile, Robertson's focus on status continuums highlights the limitations of binary categories such as free/slave and public/private, which fail to capture the complexities of women's experiences, which were both coercive and socially embedded.[17] The implication for women's history is methodological: historians must not only labour extraction but also the relational and household systems that perpetuated domination. As Lovejoy notes, concubinage was almost absent from slavery studies, yet it played a key role in the sexual exploitation of women.[18]

c. **Archival Silences and Representational Distortions**

Most written sources of African history, particularly from the pre-colonial and early colonial periods, were produced by male outsiders such as travellers, missionaries, colonial administrators and traders. These sources prioritized male political authority, warfare and diplomacy, and women were only recorded in a secondary role or as marginal, domestic or deviant figures. When women were recorded, it was often because they had disrupted colonial or missionary norms, resulting in fragmented, anonymized or distorted representations. For example, missionary archives present particular challenges. Bastian, Nourse, Elbourne, and Kolapo show that women appear in these records primarily as moral problems, dependents, or converts rather than as economic, spiritual, or social actors.[19]

[17] Robertson, "Slavery and Women in Africa," 144.
[18] Lovejoy, *Slavery in the Global Diaspora of Africa*, 8.
[19] Misty L. Bastian, "Young Converts: Christian Missions, Gender, and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria, 1880–1929," *Journal of African History* 40, no. 1 (1999): 145–147; Erin Nourse, "Women and the History of Religion in Africa,"

Jessica Marie Johnson articulates this constraint explicitly: "Any history of women of African descent during the period of slavery must build a narrative using fragments of sources and disparate materials," she says, describing an archive marked by "disappearing bodies, limited detail, and excessive violence."[20] She further conceptualizes this as archival violence, highlighting how Black women's lives are fragmented, distorted, or erased across imperial and national archives.[21] Visual sources present parallel problems. Paul H. D. Kaplan notes that in European art, "the primary attribute of enslavement is a chain, fetter, or metal collar, but of course, many enslaved people did not actually wear such things on a regular basis,"[22] making it difficult to identify enslaved African women. Abolitionist discourse also functioned as a source of distortion. Altink demonstrates how narratives of enslaved women's suffering were mobilized to advance political agendas, thereby reinforcing racialized and sexualised stereotypes that would later influence historiography.[23]

Finally, the marginalization of women must be understood in relation to the gendered definitions of what has traditionally been considered "history." African historiography has traditionally focused on states, kingdoms, elites, warfare, trade and diplomacy, as exemplified by the early scholarship of the Ibadan School. Within this framework, women's labour in areas such as kinship, reproduction, ritual, agriculture, and informal economies was classified as 'social' rather than 'historical'. This distinction reflects Eurocentric and patriarchal definitions of historical significance, rather than indicating an actual lack of influence on the part of women.

Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History (2021), 1–3; Elizabeth Elbourne, "Introduction: Key Themes and Perspectives," in *Sex, Power, and Slavery*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne (Ohio University Press, 2014), 18–21; Femi J. Kolapo, *Christian Missionary Engagement in Central Nigeria, 1857-1891* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 189–198.

[20] Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women*, 5.

[21] Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women*, 5.

[22] Paul H. D. Kaplan, "Image of the Enslaved African in European Art," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2024), 2.

[23] Altink, *Representations of Slave Women*, 1–9.

B. Contributions to the Study of Women

Despite long-standing constraints in history writing and archival research, a substantial body of scholarship has fundamentally reshaped the study of women in African history. Rather than merely incorporating women into existing narratives, this body of work reimagines fundamental historical processes such as political economy, slavery, migration, religion and representation through a gendered lens. Together, these studies show that the historical marginalization of women reflects the choices made by historians and the analytical frameworks used, rather than the absence of women from African and Atlantic histories.

a. Gender, Slavery, and Intimacy

The study of slavery has undergone a significant transformation, with scholars increasingly focusing on gender, sexuality and intimacy. Martin Klein and Claire Robertson's pioneering work, *Women and Slavery*, drew attention to the gendered nature of slavery in Africa and the significance of productive and reproductive activities in the lives of enslaved African women. Several chapters in their volume take a biographical approach, such as Edward Alpers's account of Swema and Bwanikwa by Marcia Wright.[24] Important research by Wright, Mann, and Hilse, among others, has explored themes such as captivity, sexual abuse and marriage, indicating the productive and reproductive roles that women in bondage played. However, the majority of scholarship has centred on the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period during which European colonizers pursued reforms to slavery rather than its abolition.[25]

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[24] Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

[25] Marcia Wright, "Women in Peril: A Commentary on the Life Stories of Captives in Nineteenth Century East-Central Africa," *African Social Research* 20 (1975): 800–819; Kristin Mann, "Women's Rights in Law and Practice: Marriage and Dispute Settlement in Colonial Lagos," in *African Women & the Law: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright (Boston University Press, 1982), 151–71; Daisy Hilse Dwyer, "Outside the Courts: Extra-Legal Strategies for the Subordination of Women," in *African Women & the Law: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright (Boston University Press, 1982), 90–109; Paul E. Lovejoy, "Concubinage and the Status of Women Slaves in Early Colonial Northern Nigeria," *The Journal*

A key contribution of this body of work is the assertion that coercive sexuality was not peripheral to slavery but was structurally embedded within it. Elizabeth Elbourne articulates this concept precisely: "The obligation to provide sexual labour was a critical feature of enslavement for women... in almost every society in which slavery existed."[26] Similarly, Paul E. Lovejoy observes that "Once, concubinage was virtually ignored in the literature on slavery, yet it was the central mechanism for the sexual exploitation of women" in many Islamic slave societies. Together, these interventions reposition women's bodies and reproductive capacities as fundamental sites through which slavery operated.[27]

Campbell, Miers and Miller in their edited volume reinforced this shift by highlighting that women played a central role, rather than a peripheral one, in systems of slavery throughout Africa and the Indian Ocean world.[28] This approach shifted the focus of slavery studies from male labour alone to domestic labour, reproduction, sexual coercion and household regimes of domination. Atlantic scholarship reinforces these insights. Candido and Jones highlight the variety of experiences of African women, emphasizing their diverse identities and the links between rural and urban communities, while illustrating how women's backgrounds shape their interactions. Their work explicitly re-centers women within Atlantic systems of exchange, power, and social reproduction.[29] Similarly, Pernille Ipsen and Edna Bay demonstrate that the

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of African History 29, no. 2 (1988): 245–266; and Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, "Women's Importance in African Slave Systems," in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed. Claire C Robertson and Martin A. Klein (University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 3–25.

[26] Elizabeth Elbourne, "Introduction: Key Themes and Perspectives," in *Sex, Power, and Slavery*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne (Ohio University Press, 2014), 1.

[27] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Slavery in the Global Diaspora of Africa* (Routledge, 2019), 8.

[28] Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, *Women and Slavery*, *Volume One: Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic* (Ohio University Press, 2007).

[29] Mariana P. Candido and Adam Jones, eds., African Women in the Atlantic World (Oxford: James Currey, 2019), 1-15.

later invisibilisation of African women resulted from colonial and commercial transformations, rather than from any historical absence of female power.[30]

Recent empirical scholarship has further refined these arguments through microhistorical analysis. Mariana Candido and Vanessa Oliveira draw on baptismal records from West Central Africa to demonstrate that sexual violence against enslaved women was structural to slavery systems, not incidental. Their study reveals the coercion and abuse that enslaved women were subjected to, which is often concealed in commercial and legal archives. It shows that ecclesiastical records can reveal aspects of women's enslavement that would otherwise remain invisible. For example, documents like baptism, marriage, and burial records allow historians to review the participation of enslaved women and their urban histories in Luanda and Benguela. As Candido and Oliveira conclude, "Few masters acknowledged the paternity of infants born from enslaved women at the baptismal font, yet the silences and several cases of *pai incognito* (unknown father) in this documentation suggest that the sexual use of enslaved women was a widespread practice in both Luanda and Benguela."[31]

Together, these studies highlight that incorporating gender fundamentally changes our understanding of slavery itself; what constitutes evidence, which types of labour are considered important, and how power is perpetuated across generations.

b. Women, Economy, and Social Power

Kristin Mann's analysis of nineteenth-century Lagos marked a decisive shift in African economic history. She illustrates the evolving relationships among different types of dependency

[30] Pernille Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade: Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriage on the Gold Coast* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 1-11; Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (University of Virginia Press, 1998), xi–xiv.
[31] Mariana P. Candido and Vanessa S. Oliveira, "The Status of Enslaved Women in West Central Africa, 1800-1830," *African Economic History* 49, no. 1 (2021): 145.

and their shifting significance "as rich and powerful men and women in Lagos and their subordinates struggled over the course of the nineteenth century to adapt to new opportunities and constraints."[32] As Mann explains, wealth was measured not simply in commodities but in control over people, a system in which "they often redefined the enslavement of women and girls as marriage and turned to local and colonial officials to uphold the authority of husbands over their wives.[33]

Building on this, Gracia Clark extends this intervention through her work on market women and market queens, demonstrating that women exercised recognized economic and political authority within African urban economies.[34] By reframing markets as sites of institutionalized female power rather than peripheral economic spaces, Clark challenges the notion of a binary division between formal male economies and informal female ones.

Similarly, scholarship on women, power, and politics has overturned the assumption that women were excluded from public authority. Scholars like Jones, Rodrigues, Oliveira, and Candido have studied women as slave owners, offering significant insights into gender roles and social inequalities.[35] Among these studies, which help to understand the unique experiences within African societies, Edna Bay's shows that women in Dahomey held formal political offices and that gender played a key role in state formation in the pre-colonial era.[36] Likewise, Pernille

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[32] Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, 7.
[33] Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, 6–7.
[34] Gracia Clark, "African Market Women, Market Queens, and Merchant Queens," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2018): 5.
[35] Adam Jones, "Female Slave-Owners on the Gold Coast. Just a Matter of Money?" in *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery*, ed. Step Palmié (University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 100–111; Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2013); Vanessa S. Oliveira, "Slavery and the Forgotten Women Slave Owners of Luanda (1846–1876)," in *Slavery, Memory and Citizenship* ed. Paul E. Lovejoy and Vanessa S. Oliveira (Africa World Press, 2016), 129–47; Mariana P. Candido, "Women, Family, and Landed Property in Nineteenth Century Benguela," *African Economic History* 43, no. 1 (2015): 136–61; and Eugénia Rodrigues, "Women, Land, and Power in the Zambezi Valley of the Eighteenth Century," *African Economic History* 43, no. 1 (2015): 19–56.
[36] Bay, *Wives of the Leopard,* xi–xiv.

Ipsen's work on Euro-African women on the Gold Coast shows that they strategically used marriage, property, and kinship to mediate Atlantic commerce and racial formation, challenging portrayals of women as marginal intermediaries.[37]

These insights extend into the colonial and post-colonial periods. Judith A. Byfield's work significantly advances the historiography of African women by highlighting their crucial role in the economic shifts during the colonial era. In her research on the *adire* textile industry in Abeokuta from 1890 to 1940, Byfield illustrates that women dyers served as producers, entrepreneurs, and distributors, controlling various stages of production and commerce. Their adaptation to imported cotton and to changing market needs enabled them to influence both local and regional economies, challenging views that link the decline of colonial trade to the collapse of African industry. Placing these developments within the larger colonial political economy, Byfield shows that gender and class shaped economic change, as women seized new opportunities while coping with the constraints of the interwar depression.

Her work also emphasizes the rise of women's collective action and political awareness in defending their industry, highlighting their role as active agents in history. Using archival and oral sources, she reconstructs women's economic activities and repositions them at the heart of colonial economic and social transformation.[38] Byfield explores Abeokuta again, emphasizing women's activism during the postwar era. She demonstrates their vital role in nationalist movements and economic protests. She traces how a women's tax revolt in Abeokuta evolved into the Abeokuta Women's Union and eventually Nigeria's first national women's organization, with taxation serving as a platform for women to claim citizenship. Together, the two studies

[37] Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade,* 1–11.
[38] Judith A. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: a social and economic history of women dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890–1940* (James Currey, 2002).

reveal how women's economic and political agency has been obscured, whether by narratives of colonial industrial decline or by nationalist accounts emphasizing formal institutions over popular mobilization. [39]

In her later work, Mann further reshapes interpretations of gender, property, and Christianity in colonial Lagos. In *Women, Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos*,[40] Mann demonstrates that, despite the increasing commodification of land and the gendered biases of colonial law, Yoruba women continued to acquire, control, and defend landed property. Drawing on court records and land transactions, Mann reveals how women navigated the intersection of customary and colonial legal systems to amass wealth and secure credit. In *The Dangers of Dependence*,[41] Mann extends this analysis to Christian marriage. She argues that missionary ideals of female dependence often undermined women's economic autonomy. However, women also adopted Christian practices selectively to preserve autonomy through kinship and commerce.

Read together, Mann's works reveal that the abolition of slavery, the spread of Christianity, and the growth of urban capitalism were mutually constitutive processes that reshaped gendered relations of labour, property, and respectability. Rather than being passive subjects of colonial reform, women emerge as active agents negotiating overlapping moral, legal, and economic regimes.

In *African Women in the Atlantic World: Property, Vulnerability and Mobility, 1660-1880*, Candido and Jones present several case studies examining the factors that fostered or

[39] Judith A. Byfield, The Great Upheaval. Women and Nation in Postwar Nigeria. Ohio University Press, 2021.
[40] Kristin Mann, "Women, Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos." *Signs* 16, no. 4 (1991): 682–706.
[41] Kristin Mann, "The Dangers of Dependence: Christian Marriage among Flite Women in Lagos Colony, 1880-1915," *The Journal of African History* 24, no. 1 (1983): 37–56.

restricted women's spatial and social mobility, as well as their economic power and limitations. It also explores how African women experienced these changes, how gender roles were socially constructed and transformed, the constraints imposed on women, and the strategies they employed to overcome them. In her chapter on the Freetown peninsula, Suzanne Schwarz recounts how the early female settlers, including recaptives released from slave ships, rejected the Europeans' plans for an agricultural economy in favour of commerce. They sold products (and even slaves) at local markets and further afield. Vanessa Oliveira tells us that the "natural daughter" of a deceased Portuguese man in Luanda inherited his captives, land and property, as well as those of her first husband, who died soon after she reached the legal age of marriage. In her chapter, Ademide Adelusi-Adeluyi presents two narratives of female figures who 'found freedom' in Lagos. The first is about a girl named Alabon who, depending on your perspective, was either enslaved or sold by the merchant Madam Tinubu. The second is about a woman named Awa who was bought as a slave in Ibadan and taken to Abeokuta, where she was used as a concubine and a domestic worker.[42]

c. Migration, Mission, Representation and Women's Agency

Scholarship recognizing women's agency within indigenous, Islamic and Christian traditions has reshaped religious history. Erin Nourse argues that women were not merely recipients of religious change, but rather producers of religious authority and practice, thereby challenging missionary narratives that portray women as passive converts.[43] Furthermore, she demonstrates that, while Islam and Christianity introduced new gendered constraints, they also

[42] Candido and Jones, *African Women in the Atlantic World*, 1-15, 19-37, 217-232, 131-147.
[43] Erin Nourse, "Women and the History of Religion in Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2021), 2–3.

created opportunities for women to exercise authority, thereby rejecting the notion that African religions are inherently patriarchal.

Gender analysis has had a particularly transformative effect on mission history scholarship. For example, Misty L. Bastian shows how Christian missions constructed the figure of the "young Christian woman" as a site of moral regulation, documenting women most fully at moments of sexual transgression or disciplinary intervention.[44] Femi Kolapo also shows that, although women made up the majority of church members and participants in everyday mission life, their experiences were marginalized in missionary self-representation.[45] These insights provide critical tools for interpreting missionary archives.

Gender analysis has also transformed the study of migration and mobility. Lesley Nicole Braun critiques the masculinization of migration, noting that the movement of Africans has long been portrayed as "a male phenomenon," rendering the movement of women marginal or morally suspect.[46] By re-centring women forced, marital and economic mobility, Braun reveals migration to be a deeply gendered process, embedded within household strategies and survival.

Similarly, scholars have interrogated the racialized and sexualised representation of African women in colonial and scholarly discourse. Candido and Jones demonstrate how such representations positioned women as symbols of difference rather than historical actors, thereby shaping both historical experience and historiographical interpretation.[47] Visual culture compounds these distortions: Paul H. D. Kaplan reveals that enslaved African women were frequently absent from European art, rendering their enslaved status "ambiguous or invisible."[48]

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[44] Bastian, *Young Converts: Christian Missions,* 146, 151–154.
[45] Femi J. Kolapo, *Christian Missionary Engagement in Central Nigeria, 1857–1891* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 189–192.
[46] Lesley Nicole Braun, "Women and Migration in Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2020), 1.
[47] Candido and Jones, *African Women in the Atlantic World*, 1–4.
[48] Kaplan, "Image of the Enslaved African in European Art," 2.

These representational silences highlight the importance of interpreting images and texts as spaces of absence rather than transparency.

Finally, methodological innovations have legitimized women's fragmented life histories as historical evidence. Marcia Wright's *Strategies of Slaves and Women* was a turning point, expanding the definition of resistance to encompass negotiation, mobility, kinship formation and survival strategies.[49] Building on this tradition, Jessica Marie Johnson's *Wicked Flesh* redefines freedom as an intimate and relational process, directly confronting archival fragmentation and violence.[50] Together, these works lay the methodological groundwork for reconstructing women's lives from incomplete, distorted and ideologically charged sources.

C. CMS Biographical Accounts as a Window into Viewing the History of Women

The historiographical interventions outlined above highlight the necessity and difficulty of reconstructing women's lives in African history. Conceptual limitations, archival silences and representational distortions have long obscured women's experiences, particularly in contexts shaped by enslavement, conversion and colonial reform. It is in this context that the methodological significance of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) biographical records becomes evident.

Missionary archives are not neutral repositories of information, but rather deeply moralized texts structured by European Christian norms. Bastian shows that missionaries primarily viewed young women as objects of moral concern, particularly regarding sexuality,

[49] Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women,* 4.
[50] Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women,* 5, 13–19.

marriage, and domestic discipline.[51] Consequently, women's lives were recorded episodically, often at moments of intervention, crisis, or reform, rather than as continuous narratives. Similarly, Elizabeth Elbourne emphasizes that gender and slavery were shaped by moral anxiety rather than ethnographic clarity. She notes that "the history of sexuality and enslavement should not, of course, be limited to the history of sexual intercourse between female slaves and male masters, even if this is easiest to document from available records."[52] The treatment of enslaved women and the sexual expectations imposed on them were closely connected to broader attitudes towards marriage and the extent of wives' freedom.[53]

While the missionary biographies are unreliable as transparent accounts, they are invaluable for understanding how women's lives became legible to colonial institutions. A recurring pattern in CMS records is that women only become visible when they transgress missionary norms. Bastian observes that female converts were most extensively documented when they failed to adhere to the ideals of Christian womanhood.[54] Kolapo reinforces this point by highlighting a discrepancy between participation and representation: although women formed the majority of mission communities, they remained marginal to missionary narratives.[55] This structural asymmetry shapes the archival record itself.

Despite these constraints, CMS records also preserve evidence of women's agency, negotiation and resistance. Nourse's work shows that women played an active role in shaping religious life through teaching, participating in rituals, and exercising informal authority, rather than passively receiving missionary instruction.[56] In CMS biographies, evidence of women's

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[51] Bastian, *Young Converts: Christian Missions,* 146, 151–154.
[52] Elbourne, "Introduction: Key Themes and Perspectives," 7.
[53] Elbourne, "Introduction: Key Themes and Perspectives," 12.
[54] Bastian, *Young Converts: Christian Missions,* 146, 151–154.
[55] Femi J. Kolapo, *Christian Missionary Engagement in Central Nigeria, 1857-1891* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 2019), 189–192.
[56] Nourse, "Women and the History of Religion in Africa," 2–3.

agency often emerges indirectly, through disputes, absences, relocations or conflicts concerning marriage and labour, and requires careful interpretation.

The methodological challenge, then, is to use CMS biographies without perpetuating their silences. Wright argues that women's life histories constitute valid historical evidence, even when fragmentary, because women's strategies of survival and negotiation are embedded in archival discontinuities.[57] Johnson builds on this by conceptualizing fragmentation itself as historically meaningful, as mentioned before, describing an archive of "disappearing bodies, limited detail, and excessive violence."[58] CMS biographies exemplify this condition.

This study, therefore, approaches CMS biographical records as microhistorical entry points, rather than as complete biographies. Each reference to a woman, whether in registers, newspapers, correspondence or disciplinary records, is considered part of a wider life trajectory influenced by enslavement, mobility, disruption to kinship ties and religious change.

By situating CMS biographies within the wider historiography of African women, slavery, and gender, this chapter established a methodological framework that treats missionary archives as contested spaces where women's lives are only partially recorded and often distorted, yet still recoverable through careful and critical analysis. The subsequent chapters expand upon this framework by providing detailed reconstructions of women's life histories and their representations, drawn from CMS records in Sierra Leone, the Bight of Benin, Yorubaland, and along the Niger River.

[57] Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women,* 4.
[58] Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women*, 5, 13–19.

CHAPTER 3. LANGUAGE, POLITICS, ETHNICITY, THE ORIGINS OF THE YORUBA AND THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "LIBERATED AFRICANS"

This chapter is divided into two main components. First, it examines how the term Yoruba emerged as a linguistic, political, and cultural identity within the wider changes in the nineteenth-century Bight of Benin. It begins by reconstructing the region's political landscape before 1836, highlighting the Oyo Empire, its interactions with Dahomey, and the disruptive effects of jihad and regional conflicts. The fall of Oyo and the rise of new centres such as Ibadan, Abeokuta, and New Oyo are examined as part of a period of significant reorganization. In this context, the chapter questions the development of Yoruba as an identity, emphasizing its constructed and dependent aspects rather than treating it as a fixed precolonial category.

The second part of the chapter explores how the Church Missionary Society and British anti-slavery efforts influenced the region's development. Beginning with Freetown, Sierra Leone, a central node of missionary work and the settlement of "Liberated Africans," it details the expansion of CMS networks into the Bight of Benin and along the Niger River. There is a particular focus on the return of the Aku or Saro populations, expeditions along the Niger River, and the establishment of mission stations in places such as Badagry and Lagos. The founding of the Yoruba Mission in 1845 and the British takeover of Lagos are highlighted as pivotal events that strengthened the missionary and colonial presence. The significance of education, especially through institutions such as the Girls' Schools and the Lagos Female Training Institution, was crucial to evangelization and social change within colonial and missionary efforts. Therefore, women's paths should be viewed in a context that is politically and economically active, influenced by internal conflicts and wider Atlantic developments.

A. **Political structure of the Bight of Benin interior to 1836**

a. Oyo Empire, including Dahomey, and the impact of Jihad

In 1804, Uthman d'an Fodio established the Sokoto Caliphate after launching a jihad against the Hausa states of western and central Sudan. The Islamic jihad led mostly by Fulani reformers resulted in the establishment of the government of Sokoto in the savanna states, purging the region from what was considered 'mixed Islam' during the first half of the nineteenth century. The region under the control of the Sokoto Caliphate was one of the main regions enslaving and sending people away. Martin Klein[1] discussed that new Islamic states often saw people moving within their borders looking for protection and against enslaving armies. Klein, like Lovejoy, argues that the transatlantic slave trade was a justification for the jihad in Senegambia and the western Sudan. The Caliphate covered what is today northern Nigeria, southern Niger, and eastern Cameroon and remained a dominant entity well into the twentieth century.

Lovejoy claimed that around two to four million slaves were taken or moved to the Sokoto Caliphate, primarily to work in cotton cultivation or the textile industry. The large-scale production and number of enslaved people involved in the Caliphate are comparable to those in Cuban, Brazilian and US plantations.[2] The nineteenth century saw intensified slave abuse and economic development dependent on slaves, a period which has been termed "Second Slavery" by Dale Tomich.[3] The Caliphate had a larger enslaved population than other regions at this time.

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[1] Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[2] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Jihād and Slavery in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions, 1780-1850* (Ohio University Press, 2016).
[3] Dale W. Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital and World Economy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). Tomich and Michael Zeuske, eds., "The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World-Economy, and Comparative Microhistories, Part II," special issue of Review*: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center*, 31 (2008).

According to Jennifer Loftkranz, the Sokoto government largely failed to protect the freeborn Muslims. But the double intentions of protecting them and operating a plantation economy based on slave labour proved to be incompatible sometimes. So, even though the reason why the jihad happened was to protect them, some Muslims ended up enslaved by their own Islamic states. Loftkrantz argues that the state allowed the enslaved Muslims to buy their freedom through the practice of ransoming.[4]

With the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804, Paul Lovejoy discusses that enslavement was a mechanism for the recruitment of women. Concubinage and polygyny were part of the practices in Islamic societies. The majority of the people who were enslaved were enslaved because of debts, revenge, or because they were kidnapped. Most of the prisoners were war captives sold after their capture. This included men, women, and children who were displaced from their homes and became victims of slavery, while others sought to avoid capture by becoming refugees.[5] After the jihad movements in the nineteenth century, West Africa was part of the Islamic world, distinct from the coastal areas.

As Lovejoy and Robin Law have shown, the Oyo Empire participated in the enslavement of many Muslims from the area.[6] From this moment, most of the people who became slaves remained in West Africa and were not taken to America, the Caribbean, or the Middle East. For states that opposed the jihad, Lovejoy argues they were transformed or destroyed by it. Borno ended with a more enslaved population than Brazil, according to Lovejoy. The Oyo Empire was a strong empire with an army of enslaved Africans, but after the jihad of the Sokoto, it collapsed.

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[4] Jennifer Lofkrantz, "Protecting Freeborn Muslims: The Sokoto Caliphate's Attempts to Prevent Illegal Enslavement and Its Acceptance of the Strategy of Ransoming," *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 109–27.
[5] Paul E. Lovejoy, *Slavery in the Global Diaspora of Africa* (Routledge, 2019).
[6] Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, c.1600-c.1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. (Clarendon Press, 1977). Lovejoy, *Jihād and Slavery in West Africa.*

Before the jihad, not many Yoruba people went to the Diaspora. Afterward, they end up in places like Cuba, Bahia, Brazil, or the Sokoto plantations.

The Oyo and Dahomey Empires were located in the Eastern Bight of Benin. In the case of Oyo, Robin Law discusses that it benefited from its participation in the external slave trade by enslaving and selling its neighbours. The wealth that the empire acquired was from its participation in the slave trade. By warfare and raids, and also through trade with the northern regions of the Nupe and Hausa states. Toby Green argues that the centralized state of Oyo arose with a powerful cavalry and trade networks.[7] It became a military empire with defensive walls around the towns and large African slave armies with firearms. They made long expeditions, during which they captured some slaves to sell and supplied the European trade. But also, they kept some enslaved populations to work in the palace and in agricultural production, to feed the elite, slaves and the army. Law and Green argue that the Oyo Empire was the dominant power in the region until its fall in 1835. With the collapse of Oyo, the Sokoto Caliphate enslaved many Yoruba who were sold into the Atlantic slave trade, ending in Cuba and Brazil.

The Kingdom of Dahomey, established in 1625 and inhabited by the Fon people, was a fusion of Adja and Yoruba communities.[8] By the late 1600s, Dahomey's territorial growth began to threaten its neighbouring Yoruba and Aja groups. As the Yoruba Oyo kingdom declined from the late 1700s onward, Dahomey seized the opportunity to emerge as the leading power in western Yorubaland by the 1800s.[9] Dahomey, like the Oyo Empire, became one of the most significant

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[7] Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).
[8] S. A. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Amalion Publishing, 2010), 206.
[9] I. A. Akinjogbin, "The Expansion of Oyo and the Rise of Dahomey, 1600-1800," in *History of West Africa*, vol. I, 2nd edition, eds. Ajayi, J. F. A. and Crowder, M. (Columbia University Press, 1976), 373–412.
Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 14.

slave states during the transatlantic slave trade. Law demonstrates the importance and power of the Dahomey Empire's military system in its expansion and the conquests of Allada and Ouidah.

b. Final collapse of Oyo, 1836; incorporation of Ilorin as an emirate in the Sokoto Caliphate; emergence of new centers, including Ibadan, Abeokuta, New Oyo

The nineteenth century was characterized by numerous events, developments, and transformations, making it one of the most turbulent periods in the region's history. The collapse of Oyo State at the beginning of the nineteenth century, caused by both internal and external forces, marked the onset of a series of Yoruba wars that persisted until British intervention and the restoration of peace led to the consolidation of the protectorate. These conflicts among various Yoruba groups began in 1793, continued for approximately a century, and were marked by diverse objectives and inconsistent conduct. As Falola and Usman state, the destruction of Owu and Egba towns, together with the loss of a large part of Yorubaland to Ilorin Fulani, taught Yoruba leaders the importance of uniting against a common enemy.[10] For example, one of the earliest indications of inter-polity Yoruba warfare was the conflict between the Owu kingdom and its neighbours. Owu's economic and political ambitions had long raised suspicion among Oyo, Ife, and Ijebu. These tensions ultimately culminated in Owu's fall between 1825 and 1827, after which many Egba towns accused of supporting Owu were attacked by the combined armies of Ijebu, Ife, and Oyo.[11]

While conflicts among Yoruba polities intensified in the south, significant political transformations were unfolding in northern Yoruba territory as well. Falola and Usman note that relations between Afonja, a ruler from Ilorin, and the Oyo authority had weakened considerably. In 1817, Afonja, with the support of Alimi, a Fulani Muslim scholar and preacher, sought to

[10] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 177.
[11] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 431.

detach the northern Yoruba frontier from Oyo. Alimi initiated a jihad against Oyo, which was quickly adopted by Oyo's Muslim converts. With Alimi's assistance, Afonja proclaimed independence from Oyo and gained control over Ilorin and neighbouring Yoruba groups: the Ibolos, Igbominas, and Ekitis. The victory of Ilorin over Igbomina enabled the Muslim jihad to spread further into the region, leading some local chiefs to convert to Islam. Within this broader context of Islamic expansion in West Africa, Uthman dan Fodio's jihad soon influenced the Nupe, a northern neighbour of Oyo, resulting in the formation of a military alliance between the Nupe and the Fulani.[12]

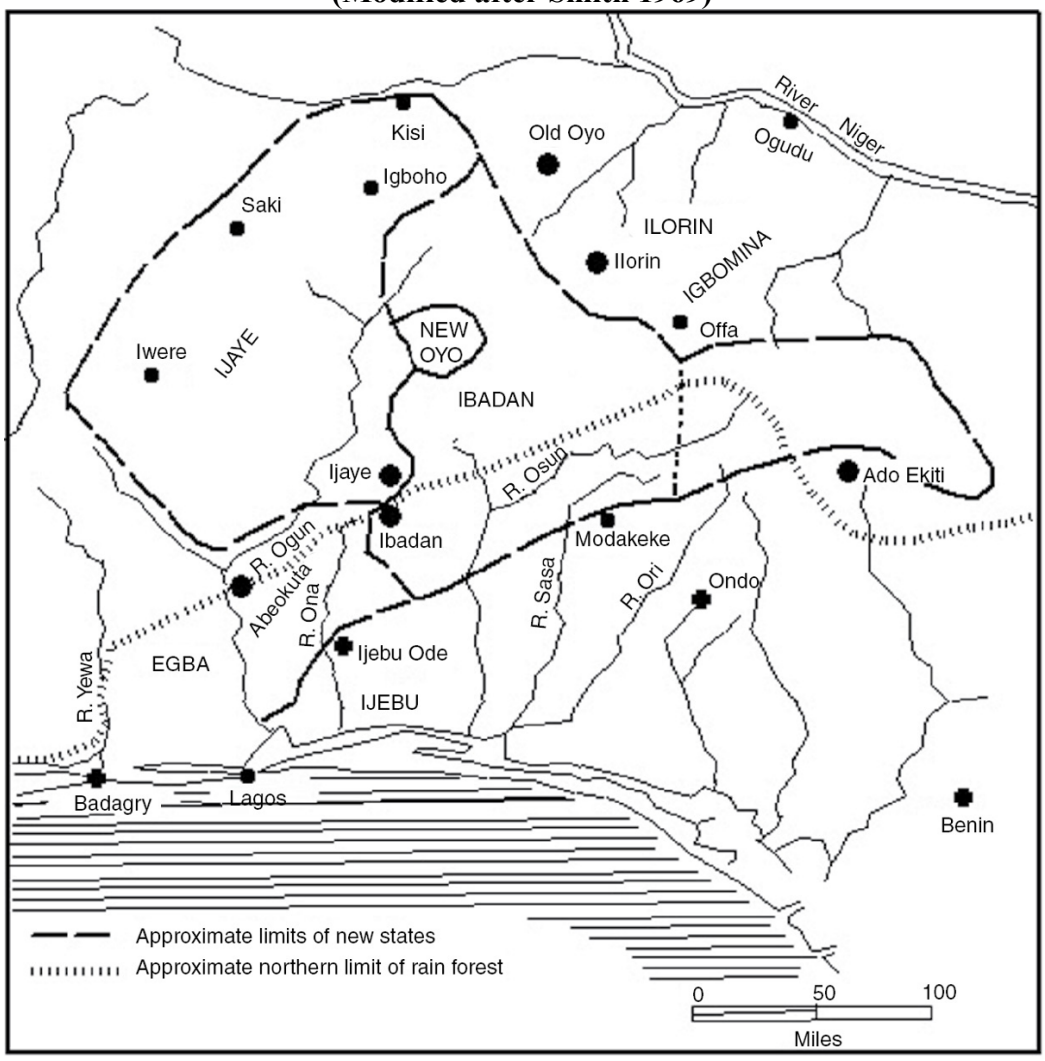
By approximately 1823-24, during a struggle for power with Alimi, the Fulani insurgency reached a decisive moment with the killing of Afonja. After 1824, Alimi's death marked a pivotal moment in Ilorin's history. His son, Abdulsalami, was designated as the imam, or leader, of the Muslim community. This appointment was subsequently formalized as a political position when the Sokoto Caliphate granted Ilorin emir status; consequently, Abdulsalami assumed the role of emir. The provision of military support from Gwandu significantly impeded Oyo's efforts to reassert control over Ilorin and the broader northern Yoruba region.[13]

These developments contributed directly to the weakening of Oyo's political authority. The Fulani's victory over the Yoruba army resulted in the complete destruction of Oyo-Ile around 1837. The Alaafin and some survivors retreated to what is now the town of Oyo (New Oyo), previously known as Agọ-Ọja. Following the collapse of the old Oyo capital, various Yoruba polities engaged in wars over succession and regional dominance. The Oyo made no further effort to regain their lost northern lands, while Ibadan emerged as Ilorin's principal southern rival.

[12] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 165–166.
[13] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 432.

The disturbances in Northern Yorubaland caused forced migrations and set off a series of events in southern Yorubaland. For instance, refugees from Oyo-Yoruba in the north migrated south and established new settlements such as Ibadan, Ijaye, Abeokuta, and Agọ-Ọja (Ago-d'Oyo). Among these emerging settlements, Ibadan grew into a well-established town, where soldiers assumed new responsibilities in governing and organizing the diverse refugee populations.[14]

Figure 3.1. Map. The 'new' Yoruba states in the nineteenth century (Modified after Smith 1969)



Source: Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 168.

[14] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 167.

Both Ibadan and Ijaye, two rising Yoruba polities, aimed to restore Oyo's former glory. At the same time, frequent raids and intermittent conflicts between Ilorin and Ibadan during the nineteenth century led to the establishment of two military outposts: Offa, a war camp of Ilorin, and Inisa, a war camp of Ibadan.[15] As Falola and Usman argue about the internal wars in Yorubaland, "…continued between the various Yoruba leaders and the Fulani-Nupe, who took advantage of the disintegration of the Oyo empire and the political vacuum created to pursue their individual political and economic ambitions. These wars fed more Yoruba people to the Atlantic slave trade until European intervened."[16]

Within this broader context of warfare and political rivalry, Ilorin also became an important centre of regional commerce. By 1850, Ilorin was a major hub for slave trading in northern Yorubaland, even under Fulani control. Slaves sold in the Ilorin market were supplied by military chiefs, affluent locals, and from northern regions such as Kano, Abuja, and Nupe territories. Buyers originated from Ilorin and from southern towns such as Ibadan, Ijebu Ode, and Abeokuta. The trade took place mainly in Ilorin's markets, notably the Gambari and the emir's markets, which were situated outside the emir's palace.[17]

By the late 1850s, Ibadan had emerged as the most dominant state in the region, and by 1860, Ibadan's aspirations for political dominance and expansion urged warfare against its rival, Ijaye. After a prolonged two-year conflict, Ijaye was destroyed, and its allies were overpowered by Ibadan. Nevertheless, the destruction of Ijaye did not resolve the ongoing hostilities among the Yoruba city-states. In 1876, a coalition called Ekitiparapo was formed

[15] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 202, 432.
[16] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 214.
[17] A. O'Hear, *Power Relations in Nigeria: Ilorin Slaves and Their Successors* (University of Rochester Press, 1997).

against Ibadan, comprising Ekiti, Ijesa, Igbomina, and Akoko, and supported by Ilorin, Egba, Ijebu, and Ife.[18]

Ibadan's conquests were often marked by the destruction of defeated villages and towns, along with an intense rush for captives. Each free-born soldier handed over some prisoners to his war chief and kept the rest. Slave-soldiers also had a chance to improve their status by successfully capturing prisoners for their masters.[19] The consequences of these wars were profound, particularly in terms of forced displacement and enslavement. Many Okun-Yoruba people were taken across the Niger River to Nupeland as slaves.[20] These captives were settled in farming villages around Bida, the emirate's capital, and these settlements were known locally as tungazi, meaning "slave plantations."[21] Inikori reports that 55 tungazi were established in 1859, which grew to 694 by 1873, and reached 1,601 by 1901.[22]

As Falola and Usman determine, the wars brought widespread misery, bloodshed, and the displacement of people. The responses to the invasion differed among individuals. The prolonged period of conflict destroyed many households, yet it also created significant opportunities for individuals to gain wealth and power as military leaders, warriors, and traders. During this time, slaves were captured to meet coastal demand, fulfill the needs of legitimate trade, and serve economic and political goals. Ilorin employed slaves as a key part of its expansionist wars. In this context, a large number of Okun-Yoruba people and other groups in the region were taken across the Niger to Nupeland as slaves. Ibadan's

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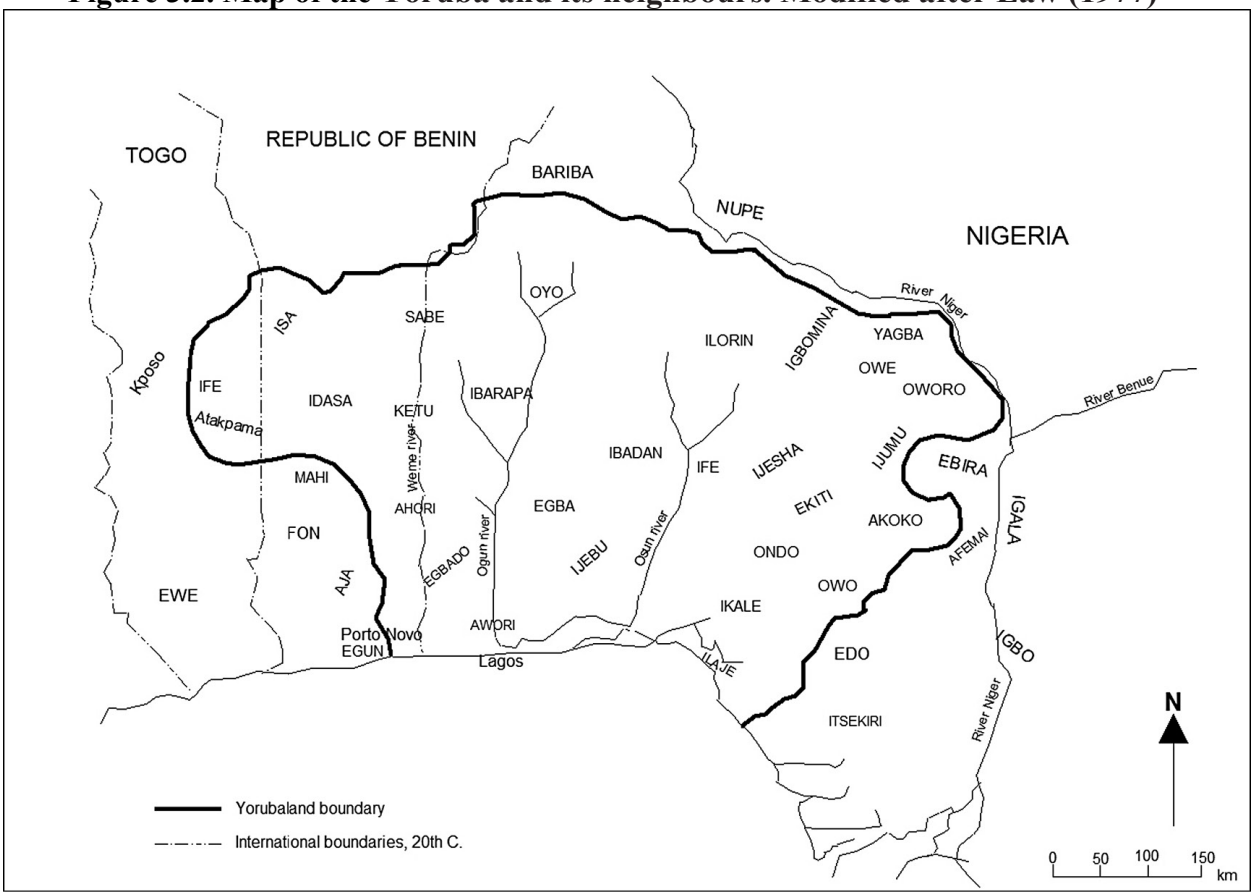
[18] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 178–187.
[19] S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893* (Humanities Press, 1971).
[20] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 174, 175.
[21] J. E. Inikori, "Slaves or Serfs? Comparative Study of Slavery and Serfdom in Europe and Africa," in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and the New World Identities*, eds. Okpewho, I., Davies, C. B., and Mazrui, A. A., (Indiana University Press, 2001).
[22] Inikori, "Slaves or Serfs? Comparative Study of Slavery," 60.

conquests were also followed by continuous, desperate efforts to capture captives. At the same time, the considerable Yoruba population compared to other groups in the New World during the nineteenth century, along with the adaptability of many Yoruba customs, offered opportunities for cultural survival and expression. The next map is an adaptation of Robin Law's map, made by Falola and Usman, showing the main neighbours of the Yoruba and the boundaries of what is called Yorubaland.

Figure 3.2. Map of the Yoruba and its neighbours. Modified after Law (1977)



Source: Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 15.

c. Yoruba as a concept?

At the beginning, there was no single name for the Yoruba as a whole. People identified themselves by their subgroup, specific settlement, or geographic region; for example, the Yoruba-

speaking communities in the Republic of Benin and Togo still refer to themselves as Ife rather than Yoruba.[23] The term Yoruba was originally assigned to the Oyo people by the Fulani or Hausa, of Arabic origin, and was adopted by the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society in the 1840s as their name for the people they aimed to evangelize. Over the following decades, they extended this term to include many other related peoples, such as the Egba, Ijesha, and Ijebu. Peel argues that these groups shared many similarities in language, culture, and traditions, and were of common descent from Ile-Ife. These similarities explain why they were commonly grouped under a single name in diasporic contexts.[24]

According to Lovejoy, the term Yoruba, referring to a group of people sharing a common language, was already in use within the Bight of Benin interior, likely before the 1500s. *Yarabawa* is the plural form for Yoruba, while the singular is *Bayarabe*. In 1613, Ahmed Baba used the term or a similar variant to describe a longstanding ethnic group.[25]

Furthermore, the term was not associated with any particular Yoruba subgroup. Some scholars, such as Clapperton and Law, referred to the Oyo group as Yoruba, but terms such as *Yarabawa* or *Yariba* also appeared among Muslim communities like the Hausa and Songhai, as well as in Arabic, long before Oyo became prominent. These terms were generally used to describe a broad group rather than a specific polity.

Prior to the widespread use of the term Yoruba, alternative names and designations were used in other regions. In Sierra Leone, they were called Aku; in Brazil, they were called Nago; in Cuba and other Spanish colonies in the Americas; and in French colonies, they were called

[23] J. Eades, *The Yoruba Today* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 4.
[24] J.D.Y. Peel, "The Three Circles of Yoruba Religion," in: *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa-Religion. Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (University of California Press, 2016), 216.
[25] Paul Lovejoy, "The Yoruba Factor in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, eds. Falola, T. and Childs, M. (Indiana University Press, 2004), 41.

Lucumi.[26] The Portuguese used the term Terranova, which was also an early name for Yoruba, and referred to slaves taken west of Benin's territory, but it fell out of use in Spanish America by the seventeenth century.[27]

Lovejoy and Ojo suggest that terms like "Lucumi, Terranova, Aku, and Nago" reflect how identity has formed among people now identified as Yoruba. These labels were used by "non-Yoruba" people to describe "the other," a term the Yoruba themselves did not use.[28] But also the use of these designations could be based on "…certain habits, characteristics, origin, location, or other special things that the "non-Yoruba" groups observed in "the other" group."[29]

The idea of a distinctly Yoruba religion suggests a set of beliefs and practices that are both shared by all Yoruba and unique to them. The issue is that the Yoruba Orisa (e.g., Ifa, Ogun, Esu-Elegba) were also found among neighbouring non-Yoruba groups, yet the cults practiced in different Yoruba towns varied considerably. As a result, what existed was less a single Yoruba religion and more a collection of local-cult systems that differed from town to town and across regions from the West to the East. Peel expands this argument by viewing Yoruba religious history as occurring within three interconnected "circles": Orisa religion in the homeland; Islam and Christianity embraced by most Yoruba; and Orisa religion as it has been transformed and expanded within the Atlantic diaspora. Rejecting linear narratives of decline or replacement, Peel emphasizes contingency, divergence, and relational analysis. He highlights a key paradox: while Orisa religion has contracted and faced increasing

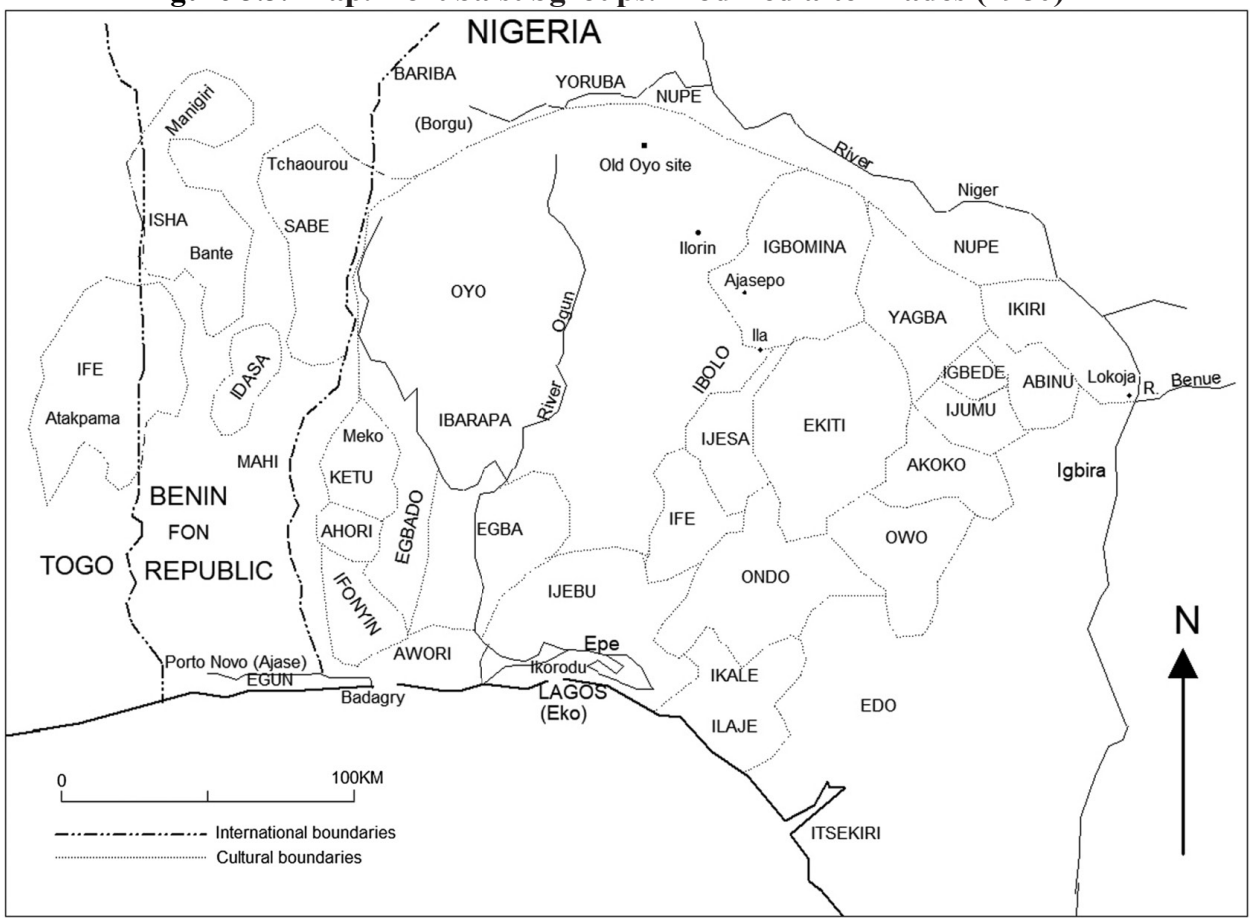
[26] Peel, "The Three Circles of Yoruba Religion," 216.
[27] H. B. Lovejoy and O. Ojo, "Lucumi," "Terranova," and the Origins of the Yoruba Nation," *Journal of African History* 56, no. 3, (2015): 358–359.
[28] Lovejoy, Ojo, "Lucumi," "Terranova," 353–372.
[29] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 5.

demonization in Yorubaland due to the assertiveness of Christian and Muslim reform movements, it has flourished in the Americas, attracting both African-descended and non-African practitioners.[30]

The concept of a unified Yoruba identity emerged in the nineteenth century, shaped by Christian missionaries and the early Yoruba elite.[31] As Falola notes, by the 1890s, when Samuel Johnson completed his book,[32] the term Yoruba was widely used by early Christian leaders to describe the land, people, and language.[33] Yet it is important to remember that "The Yoruba are divided into subgroups, and each speaks its own dialect of the common Yoruba language."[34] The following map illustrates the various Yoruba subgroups and their diversity.

[30] Peel, "The Three Circles of Yoruba Religion," 216, 214–230.
[31] Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba Nation. In Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*, eds. Falola, T. and Genova, A. (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 30.
[32] Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* ed. O. Johnson (G. Routledge & Sons, 1921; repr., Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).
[33] Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba Nation,* 29–48.
[34] Usman and Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, 27.

Figure 3.3. Map. Yoruba subgroups. Modified after Eades (1980)



Source: Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 11.

d. Political warfare, religious turbulence, and the impact of CMS missionaries

The Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century were characterized by ongoing political battles, most severe during extended sieges, resulting in serious humanitarian crises within affected communities. The fall of Owu in 1825 demonstrates the destructive potential of such conflicts: prolonged encirclement reduced the population to extreme measures for survival, including the consumption of "popondo (or awuje)," which was previously considered inedible. In this context of severe famine, social stability broke down, affecting family structures, as

indicated by the likely pawning of children as a means of survival, a phenomenon Samuel Johnson called the "fatal work" of famine.[35]

This pattern of militarized pressure and material deprivation persisted after widespread destruction across Egba territories in the 1820s. The founding of Abeokuta in 1830 did not eliminate insecurity; instead, the settlement itself faced renewed political threats, especially from the Ijebu. The resulting siege conditions greatly limited agricultural output and access to food, increasing scarcity. In such circumstances, pawning became a vital adaptive strategy, as "desperate people pawned their children, wives," or dependents to those with access to resources, particularly in the Itoko and Ijemo quarters. Therefore, political warfare directly led to social practices that, under pressure, restructured kinship and dependency relations.[36]

During the Ijaye war (1860–62), religious conflict was most evident amid a severe famine described as becoming "increasingly desperate." While some food supplies circulated, their distribution mainly benefited military groups, leaving civilians severely deprived. In this setting, Christian missions, especially those of the Baptists and the CMS, became closely involved in local survival tactics. Many people pawned children "not only to the missionaries for ready cash, but also to Egba soldiers and traders."[37] According to Oroge, from March to August 1860, Baptist missionaries alone received eighteen children in pawn, and by the next year, they had relocated over seventy to Abeokuta. These examples show how missionary organizations operated within and were influenced by the crisis conditions created by warfare.[38]

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[35] J.F.A. Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1964), 69. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas,* 209.
[36] S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours* (Clarendon Press, 1957), 17–18.
[37] Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare,* 98.
[38] Adeniyi Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey of the Yoruba Institution of Indenture," *African Economic History*, no. 14 (1985), 77.

The involvement of missionaries also generated forms of intra-missionary rivalry and ethical dilemmas. Rev. Adolphus Mann, an Anglican CMS missionary at Ijaye and a critic of the iwofa practice, initially opposed the Baptist method of accepting pawned children, seeing it as endorsing the system. However, the circumstances prompted him to change his stance; by late 1860, he had begun implementing similar practices, increasing his boarding house population from just two children before the war to thirty-three by October 1861, aided by the Ijaye Relief Fund, organized by the CMS in Abeokuta. This shift highlights the competitive and adaptive aspects of missionary work, as different denominations responded to the same crisis with overlapping, sometimes contradictory, strategies.[39]

At a structural level, the practice of pawning during these conflicts cannot be solely attributed to economic desperation. While famine and trade disruptions, particularly the scarcity of cowries during the Ijaye (1860–62) and Kutuje (1862–65) wars, played a significant role in encouraging pawning, the institution also provided specific protections. Creditors were legally required to safeguard the lives of pawns, and in many cases, these creditors had greater resources to ensure their subsistence. Therefore, pawning served as a response not only to political violence and economic upheaval but also to social risks, including the dangers of kidnapping, starvation, and enslavement associated with wartime mobility.[40]

Certainly, the broader landscape of warfare and scarcity was not solely defined by collapse; it also highlighted the role of local actors in managing crisis conditions. War chiefs and wealthy traders, such as Madam Ogunsola of Ibadan, engaged in relief and accumulation systems by taking children into pawn and maintaining commercial networks with Lagos. Her support for

[39] Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 77–78. Mann to Venn, 2 October 1861, C.M.S. CA2 066. J.F.A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891* (Longman, 1965), 139.
[40] Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria* 139. Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare*, 98. Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 78–79.

the missionary Mr. and Mrs. Hinderer and likely aid to other households demonstrates the intersection of local agency, economic influence, and wartime adaptation.[41] The Yoruba wars created a complex environment in which political conflicts, religious influences, and social changes were deeply interconnected. The actions of CMS missionaries and their Baptist counterparts did not occur in isolation but were shaped by the pressures of famine, economic upheaval, and changing systems of dependency, leading to both cooperation and conflict within the broader field of missionary activity and colonial programs.

The arrival of Christian missionaries created significant tensions within this established socio-political order. As Adelowo Felix Adetunji notes, both ideologically and in practice, missionary activity was seen as an intrusion into the social and political life of Yoruba communities. Their presence led to divisions among traditional rulers, who became polarized into pro-missionary and anti-missionary factions.[42] Ayandele further observes that those involved in the slave trade or in practices disapproved of by colonial authorities often resisted missionary influence. Conversely, other leaders adopted a more pragmatic view, understanding that despite ideological differences, engaging with missionaries and colonial officials could bring material and social gains if approached openly.[43]

Another example of the interaction between local communities and missionaries is Bishop James Johnson's activities in Ijebu, which must be understood within the broader institutional changes in the Yoruba Mission field. As noted, "a very important step has been taken in the development of the Yoruba Native Churches at Abeokuta, Ibadan, & c. Mr.

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[41] Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 79.
[42] Adelowo Felix Adetunji, "Traditional Politics and Missionary Activities During the Colonial Era in Yorubaland, Nigeria: The Implications for Modern Missionaries," *AAMM,* 3, no. 47, (2011), 49.
[43] E.A. Ayandele*, The missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (Longman, 1966), 5–7.

Townsend, having finally returned home, after forty years' labour, and there being now no European in the interior, the Rev. James Johnson, the well-known African clergyman, has been appointed to the general charge of the Yoruba Mission (except Lagos and other stations)."[44] This change signified a major shift from European to African leadership within the mission, reshaping both evangelization methods and the interaction with local communities.

Within this developing context of African-led missionary efforts, Johnson initiated his work in Iperu. However, his efforts took place in a background of previous missionary failures. Before his initial visit in 1878, efforts to introduce Christianity to the community had already failed under the European missionary Reverend D. Hinderer, who had visited Iperu approximately 39 years earlier without achieving lasting results. This earlier experience underscored the depth of local resistance and helped contextualize the challenges Johnson would subsequently confront in introducing Christianity to the community.[45]

Johnson's arrival was immediately noticed. Despite efforts to stay discreet, news of his presence and that of his African associates quickly spread to community leaders. Their goal to spread Christianity sparked swift hostility, as local authorities saw missionary efforts as a threat to existing religious and social systems. This resistance led to persecution not only against recent converts but also against those sympathetic to the new faith. A prominent case is Chief Bisuga, whose property was seized and his house destroyed, forcing him into exile in Ijebu-Ode for eight years before he was allowed to return and reunite with his family.[46]

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[44] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 96.
[45] Adetunji, "Traditional Politics and Missionary Activities," 51.
[46] James Johnson, "Civic Leadership: Confrontation with the Ogboni, 1892," in E.A. Ade. Adegbola(ed.) *Traditional Religion in West Africa* (Sefer. James 1998), 93–94. Adetunji, "Traditional Politics and Missionary Activities," 52

In response to these tensions, Christian representatives made formal requests to the community. They asked for permission to set up a mission station, end persecution of both converts and hopeful converts, and recall children who had fled due to religious violence. They also requested approval for a resident missionary to support evangelism and education, as well as land for building a church. These requests were presented not as new burdens but as actions already taken in other Yoruba towns such as Abeokuta, Ibadan, Oyo, and Sagamu, positioning Iperu within a larger regional pattern of missionary activity.[47]

Despite ongoing resistance, Johnson stayed dedicated to his mission. He returned to Iperu in August 1892, showing his personal determination and the ongoing interest of missionary networks in the area.[48] This renewed effort aligned with a major shift in Ijebu's political and military scene. The acceptance of missionary work in Iperu seems closely tied to the broader context of British military intervention. The Ijebu, who had long opposed both colonial rule and missionary efforts, were forced to surrender after a military campaign in 1892. A small force, fewer than 500 soldiers, including Hausa troops and auxiliaries from the Gold Coast, defeated the Ijebu, leading to their submission to the Lagos Government and the region opening to missionary activity in May 1892.[49]

The consequences of this military defeat were significant. The shock of the British victory caused widespread fear among previously resistant communities, weakening trust in indigenous religious institutions. Many interpreted the failure of local deities and protective systems to prevent defeat as a sign of their reduced effectiveness. The destruction of the Ogboni

[47] Johnson, "Civic Leadership: Confrontation with the Ogboni," 97. Adetunji, "Traditional Politics and Missionary Activities," 53.
[48] Adetunji, "Traditional Politics and Missionary Activities," 52.
[49] Ayandele*, The missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria,* 68. Adetunji, "Traditional Politics and Missionary," 55.

house by British forces further destabilized existing religious and political systems, creating a void that allowed Christianity to expand.[50]

In this context, conversion to Christianity was not solely a matter of spiritual conviction but was also shaped by the broader reconfiguration of power. In Ijebu province more generally, resistance to both colonial administration and missionary activity ultimately provoked military intervention. The outcome of the 1892 campaign significantly altered local conditions, easing tensions and creating a more strategic environment for missionary operations. Consequently, as Adetunji argues, the imposition of colonial authority and the weakening of indigenous institutions played a decisive role in paving the way for the establishment and expansion of Christian enterprises in the region.[51]

B. The Church Missionary Society and British Suppression of the Slave Trade in West Africa

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was founded by the Church of England on April 12, 1799. Its founders were members of the Clapham Sect, a group of evangelical reform activists who were highly active in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and closely connected to the British intellectual and political elite. Their program combined moral reform, Christian philanthropy, and social action, and promoted the abolition of slavery, Christian education, and evangelization throughout the territories of the Empire.

[50] C.O. 147 85, Carter to Knutsford, 20 June 1892. Ayandele*, The missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria,* 68; Adetunji, "Traditional Politics and Missionary Activities," 55.
[51] Adetunji, "Traditional Politics and Missionary Activities," 55.

Figure 3.4. and 3.5. The Church Missionary Society's House, Salisbury Square



Source: 3.4. The Church Missionary Society's House, Salisbury Square. Illustration for the Church of England by HDM Spence (Cassell, 1905). 3.5. Salisbury Square illustration for Relics and Memorials, London city by James S. Ogilvy (George Routledge, 1910).

From this base, they fostered the creation of institutions such as the CMS to carry their religious and moral project onto a global scale. Among its members were Henry Thornton and William Wilberforce. Thornton, an economist and banker, was a member of the British Parliament. Wilberforce, a British politician, served in the House of Commons from 1780 to 1825. Both played prominent roles in the founding and management of the Sierra Leone Company at the end of the eighteenth century.[52]

In West Africa, the CMS established its first mission in Sierra Leone. The first two missionaries were sent to the Pongo River. However, from 1816 onward, efforts were concentrated in the colony of Sierra Leone, with headquarters established in Freetown. One of the greatest challenges they faced was the high mortality rate among missionaries, some of

[52] Paul E. Lovejoy, Suzanne Schwarz, "From Company Administration to Crown Control: experimentation and adaptation in Sierra Leone in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth centuries," in *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Harriet Tubman Series on the African Diaspora. Africa World Press, 2015).

whom arrived in these territories accompanied by their wives. Between 1804 and 1824, approximately 53 missionaries are estimated to have lost their lives.[53]

Two plaques highlight the importance of the CMS missionaries to the church and the social work they did for their communities. These plaques are on the walls of St. Charles' parish church in Regent, Sierra Leone. The Rev. William A.B. Johnson was the first Pastor and founder of this church, serving from 1816 until his passing in 1823. But these commemorations were not only meant for the men in the field but also for the devoted wives, who were also workers of the church and received less recognition in most cases. The second plaque is in memory of Catharina Helena, the wife of C.A. Gollmer, a missionary who served in the Yoruba Mission and later headed the Badagry station.

Figure 3.6. y 3.7. Church Plaques from Regent Church





Source: Photos taken by Leidy Alpízar.

In the next image, we can see a long list of people who were part of the Regent church and important religious figures who not only had their endeavours in Regent as missionaries, but also moved to other regions, such as Gollmer, Kissling, and Nicol. But later, some would also become Bishops, like Weeks. Regent was an important parish in Sierra Leone where "Liberated

[53] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, vol 1. Africa and The Mohammedan lands of the East (Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, 1887), 2.

Africans" were educated in the church to later become missionaries and spread the word of religion. Some of the people on the plaque died in Regent and lived there for a short time, but others moved to another station, as explained in the remarks column in the image.

Figure 3.8. Regent Church Plaque.



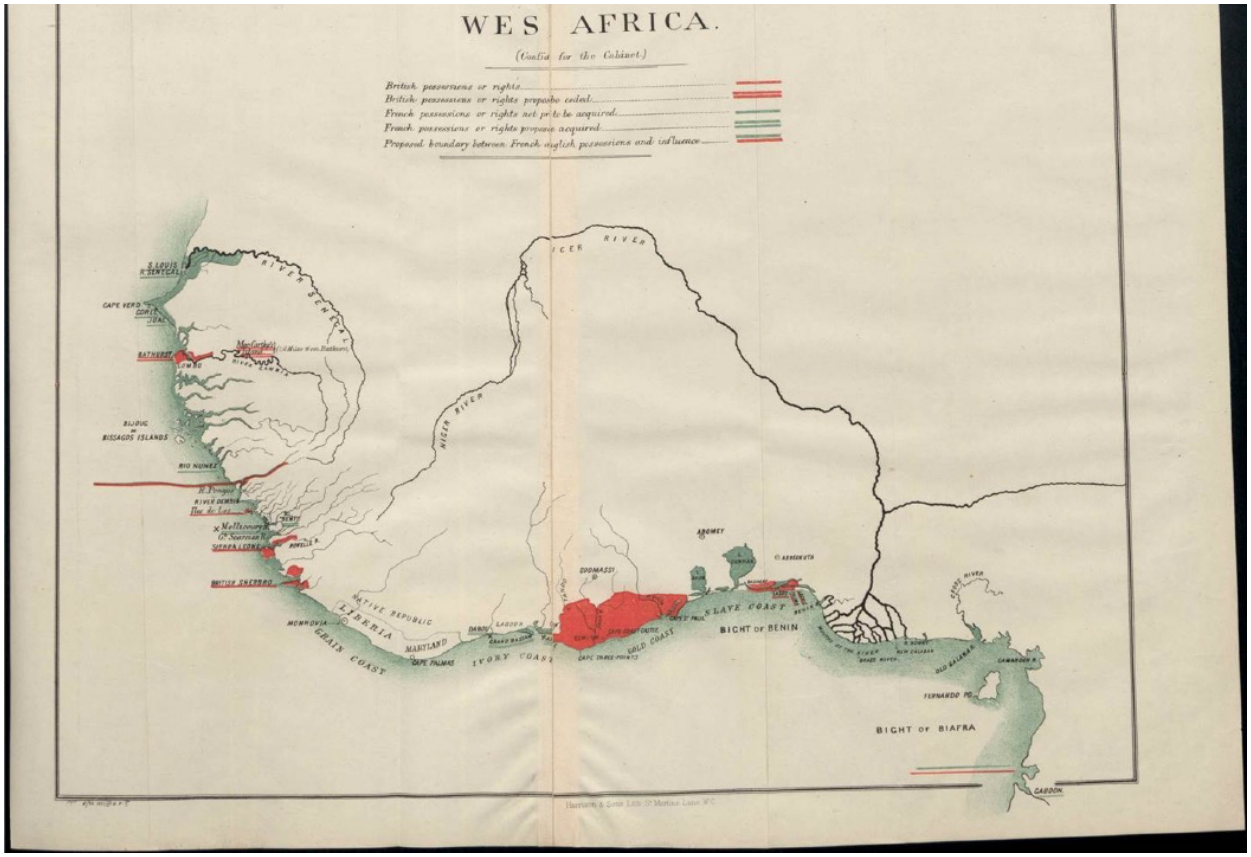
Source: Photo taken by Leidy Alpízar.

Subsequently, as will be discussed later, other missions were established in the Bight of Benin. Following the occupation of Badagry in 1845, the Yoruba Mission was inaugurated and later expanded to Abeokuta and Lagos. In 1857, the Niger River Mission began.[54] These missions were driven in part by the flow of people seeking to return to their territories of origin, many of whom were now missionaries themselves. By 1875, the British territories appear as

[54] "Chronological table: showing the principal events connected with the Society's Missions to West and East Africa," *Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. III, 1876, 96.

shown in the following map, mainly along the coast but already extending into the interior of the Bight of Benin.

Figure 3.9. Map. West Africa and the British possessions, 1875



Source: A selection of maps from 'Confidential Print: Africa.' West Africa, 1875. Confidential Print Africa Maps n. 114[55]

a. Freetown, Sierra Leone, and the CMS

Freetown, "the Province of Freedom," was founded in 1787 by British philanthropists associated with Granville Sharp and the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor in London, with the support of the abolitionist movement. The aim was to create a settlement for free people of African descent living in Great Britain. However, the initial project failed, and the colony was refounded in 1791 by the Sierra Leone Company with a new group of settlers: the Nova Scotians

[55] En:https://www.confidentialprintafrica.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Detail/westafrica./15022467?item=15022882. Images are reproduced courtesy of *The National Archives*, London, England. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

(1,131 people of African descent from Nova Scotia, Canada, who had obtained their freedom by fighting on the British side during the American War of Independence) and the Jamaican Maroons (approximately 550 individuals who arrived as semi-voluntary migrants). In both cases, they had initially been settled in Nova Scotia, Canada, but due to dissatisfaction with the land and climate, they were relocated to Freetown as part of the abolitionist project and the Company's settlement plan.[56]

During this period, the Company established itself in Freetown on land located on the southern bank of the estuary at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River. The nearest local populations were the Temne, with whom agreements were reached to settle on the Freetown Peninsula. The Sherbro and the Bullom in the surrounding areas, as well as the Susu to the north along the Pongo River, influenced the colony's development and well-being through local relationships and tensions that shaped settlement patterns in Freetown.[57] In the nineteenth century, under British colonial intervention, the term "Sierra Leone" referred solely to the city of Freetown and the immediate area of the peninsula.[58]

The British Crown's acquisition of the territory as a colony in 1808 marked imperial intentions and the deployment of military resources to suppress the transatlantic slave trade. This transformed Freetown into the first base of the British anti-slavery navy, which patrolled the West African coast. The colony's population thus came to include local inhabitants, those who had arrived prior to the nineteenth century, and people liberated from slave ships.[59] On November 10, 1808, Sierra Leone's British Court of Vice-Admiralty landed the first group of

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[56] Paul E. Lovejoy, and Suzanne Schwarz, "*Sierra Leone in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,"* in *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Harriet Tubman Series on the African Diaspora. Africa World Press, 2015), 13-14; Suzanne Schwarz, "Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century," *History in Africa* 39 (2012), 6-7.
[57] Katrina Keefer, *Children, Education and Empire in Early Sierra Leone Left in Our Hands* (Routhledge, 2019), 10.
[58] Lovejoy, Schwarz. *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition,* 4.
[59] Lovejoy, Schwarz. *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition*, 2-3.

sixty recaptives, with many more arriving in later years. In 1826, the recaptive population in Sierra Leone had increased to 21,354.[60]

The individuals transported to Freetown from slave ships came from different regions of the West African coast; they had been abducted, enslaved, and forced aboard slave vessels. Indeed, many of these ships were redirected back to the African continent following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. When the British Royal Navy established a maritime surveillance line along the West African coast, between Sierra Leone and the Gulf of Guinea, and at times extending southward into the Atlantic near Angola and Brazil, this imaginary line defined the operational area of the West Africa Squadron. This fleet was responsible for intercepting slave ships, freeing the captives, and transporting them primarily to Freetown, where they were registered as "Liberated Africans."

According to Erika Melek, this designation constituted an artificial identity created by the Vice-Admiralty Court and the colonial administration of Sierra Leone.[61] The term "Liberated Africans" first appeared in Sierra Leonean primary sources in November 1807 and entered parliamentary documents by 1820;[62] previously, other terms such as "captured," "recaptives," or "prize" had been used to refer to this group. In response, the British government officially renamed the Captured Negro Department as the Liberated African Department (LAD) in 1822.

This process of "liberation" operated through a complex network of courts that determined the fate of tens of thousands of people captured during the suppression of the slave trade. However, the use of the term "liberated" is misleading, as it implies a condition of full

[60] Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," 7.
[61] Érika Melek Delgado, "Liberated African 'Children' in Sierra Leone: Colonial Classifications of 'Child' and 'Childhood,' 1808–19," in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896*, eds. Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson (University of Rochester Press, 2020), 84.
[62] Sean M. Kelley, "Precedents: The 'Captured Negroes' of Tortola, 1807–22," in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896*, eds. Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson (University of Rochester Press, 2020), 27.

freedom, whereas the majority were subjected to lengthy periods of servitude under imperial patronage. "Apprenticeship" contracts often amounted to alternative forms of forced labour or debt bondage.[63] According to Henry Lovejoy, between 1808 and 1885, Freetown received approximately 103,000 people in this category. Between 1808 and 1848, an estimated 19,400 women and 42,212 men lived in settlements of "Liberated Africans" in the colony of Sierra Leone, for a total of 61,612 "liberated" individuals during the colony's first forty years.[64]

After disembarkation, the recaptives were taken to the Yard operated by the LAD, where they were initiated and instructed into British civilization. As part of this system, once "liberated," individuals were required to undergo a period of apprenticeship and instruction under the guidance of the CMS, during which they were expected to adopt the Christian faith. Some were drafted into military service; others enlisted in the police constabulary; some apprenticed to settlers or merchants; and others performed various types of labour in different colonial departments. Most, however, were sent into the parish villages for the purpose of "civilization."[65]

Supported by the government and Christian missions, the "Liberated Africans" initially settled on the outskirts of Freetown in areas known as Portuguese Town, Congo Town, and Soldier Town. They later established several parish villages with government and mission

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[63] Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, eds. "Introduction: 'Liberated Africans' and Early International Courts of Humanitarian Effort," in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896* (University of Rochester Press, 2020), 3-4.

[64] Henry B. Lovejoy, "Conceptualizing 'Liberated Africans' and Slave Trade Abolition: Government Schemes to Indenture Enslaved People Captured from Slavery, 1800–1920," *Past & Present*, (2024), 43, 45. Daniel Domingues da Silva, David Eltis, Philip Misevich, and Olatunji Ojo, "The Diaspora of Africans Liberated from Slave Ships in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 55, no. 3 (2014): 347–69. Richard Anderson, "The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and 'Liberation' at Freetown, 1808–1863," *African Economic History* 41 (2013): 101–38. Tara Helfman, "The Court of Vice Admiralty at Sierra Leone and the Abolition of the West African Slave Trade," *Yale Law Journal* 115, no. 5 (2006): 1122–56. Johnson U. Asiegbu, "The Dynamics of Freedom: A Study of Liberated African Emigration and British Antislavery Policy," *Journal of Black Studies* 7, no. 1 (1976): 95–106. Christopher Fyfe, "Four Sierra Leone Recaptives," *Journal of African History* 2, no.1 (1961): 77–85.

[65] Padraic X. Scanlan, *"*The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815–1824," *American Historical Review* (2016), 1086, 1098.

support: Leicester, established in 1809; Wilberforce, Regent, Gloucester; Kissy, and Leopold in 1817; Bathurst and Charlotte in 1818; and Kent, York, Wellington, Hastings, the Isles de Los, and Waterloo in 1819. Additionally, they settled in the Bananas area in 1820.[66] At the centre of each parish village was the church and a school, with a clergyman initially also overseeing political matters, while the schoolmaster was responsible for the school.[67]

Cooperation between the Church and schools was fundamental, as individuals not only learned the gospel but also the English language and everyday skills they were deemed to "lack." They later became exemplars of Christian values. Institutional structures such as Sunday or Day Schools, followed by village schools (Liberated African Schools) and secondary institutions for boys and girls in Freetown, were replicated in missions established in Yoruba territories. African clergy educated in Freetown and in England also participated in these missions.[68] The missionaries worked as "administrators as well as preachers, organizing agriculture, operating schools, and maintaining village registers."[69]

Freetown became the principal missionary and educational center of the CMS in the region, from which missions were organized eastward into what is now Nigeria. In 1822, around 2,000 formerly enslaved individuals, both children and adults, were enrolled in mission schools. By 1825, the local population that had migrated to this territory was joined by 10,359 "Liberated Africans," of whom approximately 3,000 attended church and 493 were baptized converts.[70] At

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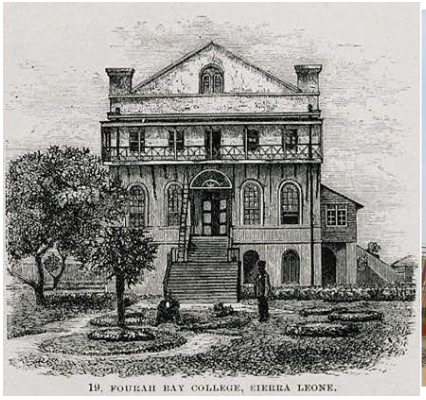
[66] Christopher Fyfe*, Sierra Leone Inheritance* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 131; Claude George, *The Rise of British West Africa: Comprising the Early History of the Colony of Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Lagos, Gold Coast, etc. With a Brief Account of Climate, the Growth of Education, Commerce, and Religion and a Comprehensive History of the Bananas and Bance Islands and Sketches of the Constitution* (Cass, 1968), 155, 217–218.
[67] George, *The Rise of British West Africa*, 218.
[68] Erika Melek Delgado, "Children, Childhood and Slavery in Sierra Leone: The Experiences of Liberated African Children, c.1808–1834" (PhD thesis, University of Worcester, 2017). Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, eds. *Children in Slavery through the Ages* (Ohio University Press, 2009).
[69] Scanlan, *"The Colonial Rebirth," 1089.*
[70] *Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. III, 1876 "Chronological table: showing the principal events connected with the Society's Missions to West and East Africa," 96.

the same time that people were rescued from slave ships and settled in villages around Freetown, as Fiona Leach states, "As Liberated Africans were rescued off slave ships (…), baptized girls were encouraged to marry boys from the mission station, and they would be settled in huts nearby," so settling nearby and working in support of the colony.[71]

In 1827, the CMS founded *Fourah Bay College* with the aim of training African teachers, catechists, and ministers for Anglican missions in West Africa. It soon became the first institution of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa and an intellectual center of enormous regional influence that endures to this day. Fifty years later, it was affiliated with the University of Durham (United Kingdom), further strengthening its academic activity. Over time, it became a leading institution for academic training, a reputation it continues to hold. By 1842, it already stood out as a college, educating 27 students, and it was noted that "the willingness of chiefs and tribes of the interior to receive instruction from their own countrymen has been clearly demonstrated."[72]

Illustration 3.1. and Figure 3.10. Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone





Source: Illust. 3.1. *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 1887, 8. Fig. 3.10. Photo taken by Leidy Alpízar.

[71] Fiona Leach, "African Girls, Nineteenth-century Mission Education and the Patriarchal Imperative," *Gender and Education* 20, no. 4, (2008), 339.
[72] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. II, 1842, 112.

Among its early students was Samuel Crowther,[73] who, after being enslaved and forcibly displaced, arrived in Freetown as a child after being liberated. There, he was educated by the CMS and trained for missionary service, becoming the first African to be ordained as a priest. In 1841, he undertook his first expedition to Nigeria and, later, together with the Reverend Townsend, reached Abeokuta, which was incorporated into the Yoruba Mission.

The CMS missionary organization relied on a diverse group of collaborators in its early years. According to Katrina Keefer, the first expeditions to Sierra Leone were led by a diverse group of men from Central and Northern Europe who shared a common language, German, and the Lutheran faith.[74] English missionaries were later added to this group. From 1820 onward, with the arrival of a large population and the establishment of *Fourah Bay College*, Africans were incorporated into the clergy and played a fundamental role in mission schools across different territories. This process of inclusion was slow but gradual. Each diocese had a bishop, European missionaries, and, later, an African director of schools. African pastors were subsequently trained, although bishops remained European.

In 1845, the first secondary school in Freetown was founded, providing education exclusively to boys and young men from the colony and other parts of the region. This school later supplied students to *Fourah Bay College*. In the village of Regent, by 1846, the number of women receiving Christian instruction was notable. Of the 373 communicants, 209 were already

[73] "Crowther was born in the Oyo town of Osogun around 1806. He was seized when the town fell in 1821 and sold to a Portuguese slave-trader to be shipped to Brazil before his liberation and settlement in Sierra Leone in 1822. He entered Fourah Bay College in 1827, the Church Missionary College at Islington in 1842, became a deacon in June 1843, and was ordained on 1 October 1843. He served on British expeditions to the Niger between 1841 and 1871. He returned to Yorubaland in 1845 worked in Badagry, Abeokuta, finally as Bishop of the Niger Diocese from 1864 until his death in Lagos on 1 December 1891. With Rev. Thomas King, he translated part of the Bible and the Book of Prayer into Yoruba. He also wrote on Yoruba, Nupe and Igbo languages." From Ojo, "The Yoruba Church Missionary Society Slavery Conference 1880," 97. For more information: "Narrative of Events in the Life of a Liberated Negro, now a Church Missionary Catechist in Sierra Leone," *Missionary Register* 25 (1837): 433–40 and Jesse Page, *Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy who Became Bishop of the Niger* (Fleming Revell, 1888).
[74] Keefer, *Children, Education and Empire*, 187.

baptized, and 108 were undergoing the two-year instructional process required for baptism.[75] Not all women who converted entered schools, but there was evident interest among women of different ages in engaging with the church.

Melchior Renner and Peter Hartwig, the first two Lutheran missionaries who departed from London for Sierra Leone in 1804, set out clear CMS instructions. They highlighted the gendered aspect of evangelizing efforts, describing it as a settlement with a small Christian community made up of both men and women, with a "… practical influence of Christianity in regulating the tempers and the life, and in thus increasing the domestic felicity."[76]

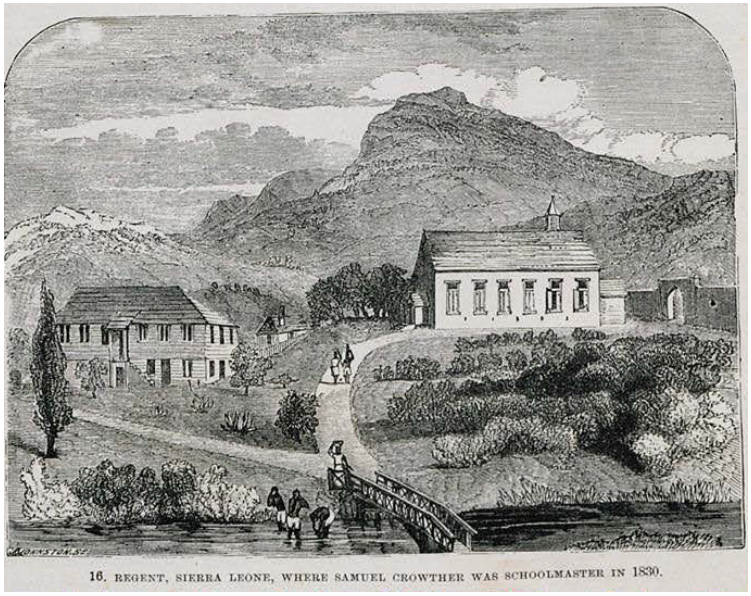
This idea of "domestic felicity" was embedded in the education system, with a curriculum tailored to gender roles. From the beginning, CMS records from Sierra Leone indicate that schooling was organized along gender lines whenever possible. Over time, social class became a more prominent marker of "difference" in Africa, especially after the introduction of selective secondary schools in the late 1840s, as we will see in Freetown and also in Lagos. Leach argues that, in addition, race emerged as a defining distinction from the 1860s onward, coinciding with the rise of social Darwinism and its biological notions of racial superiority, which strongly influenced European public opinion.[77]

In 1846, a program for girls was established in Regent under the direction of Miss Sophia Hehlen, head of the Female Institution. The program aimed to prepare young women with useful domestic skills and to train them as future teachers and administrators. Instruction included sewing, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and composition, and the first cohort consisted

[75] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. VI, 1846, 30–31.
[76] Eugene Stock, *History of the Church Missionary Society*, vol 1. (Church Missionary Society, 1899).
[77] Fiona Leach, "The schooling of girls in early 19th century Sierra Leone," in *Gender, sexuality and Development* (2008), 41.

of eight students. In her journal, Hehlen recorded on December 28, 1846:[78] "Today my dear girls from Regent have arrived, and their names are as follows: Susanna Crowther, Abigail Crowther, Jane Attara, Sarah March, and Hannah Booy."[79] Two of Samuel Crowther's daughters were among them.

Illustration 3.2. Regent, Sierra Leone 1830



Source: *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, Church Missionary House, 1887, 8.

In 1849, this institution was relocated to Kissey in Freetown, under the name Female Institute, offering secondary education exclusively to girls and young women under the direction of Julia Sass, who worked for the CMS in West Africa for approximately twenty-one years.[80] Regarding the central role of girls' education, Fiona Leach notes that it sought "the promotion of

[78] CA1 O114
[79] M. Sophia Hehlen, *Journal Extracts for the Quarter ending*, 25 March 1847. CA1 O114
[80] CA1 O187. Julia Sass was the first in a long line of mostly unmarried professional women sent by British mission societies to Africa, with two short periods back in Europe due to health problems, 1853, Feb. 1 to England; 1855, Oct. 24 to Sierra Leone; 1860, Feb. 20, to England; 1864, Jan. 25, to Sierra Leone. 1869, July 27, to England and retired from failing health. She died on October 20, 1891. The Female Institute 'took a fresh start under Miss Sass' zealous management and developed into the 'Annie Walsh Memorial School' on the gift of L.2500, by Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Walsh of Wanstead, in memory of their daughter," *Church Missionary Society, "*Female missionaries," *Register of Missionaries, from 1804-1894* (printed by Gilbert and Rivington, Ld., s.f.), 264.

this ‘domestic happiness’ through a gender-differentiated curriculum, in which girls were instructed in skills considered ‘feminine’ by female teachers, preferably in separate schools.”[81]

The system also allowed girls to receive advanced education within the homes of missionary couples, who took in two or three girls at a time. For example, the Reverend Kissling and his wife were responsible for educating several of them. Mrs. Kissling described, in the following note, the importance of women in the education of other women:

> “The girls, especially the older ones, spend much time with me. I feel a deep concern to do all I can for these girls, in the hope that they may eventually become useful in our Mission. The lack of competent female teachers is deeply felt; the female character here, in general, lags far behind the male. The number of European women is also so small that their influence cannot be extensive. We would sincerely welcome more fellow laborers among us. I believe that in some cases we women can do things better than our dear husbands; at least, women seem more willing to confide their difficulties and sufferings to us, which we can understand better than they can. Moreover, we receive counsel and guidance on how to act from those who, by greater experience and sounder judgment, are better able to decide than we are.”[82]

During the 1800s, women's roles in missions gradually evolved from mainly supporting their missionary husbands as domestic helpers to taking a more active part in education, social reform, and the broader imperial effort to ‘civilize’ through their work.[83] Women’s participation in mission work was initially led by the Roman Catholic Church, which effectively used nuns to connect with local communities. By the late nineteenth century, with the discovery and adoption of quinine, which reduced mortality rates, Europeans aimed to dominate the trade. As inland expansion grew, the demand for women to support missions increased, and their presence in

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[81] Leach, “African Girls, Nineteenth century,” 337.
[82] *The Missionary Registers,* vol. 28, 1840, 48.
[83] Emily J. Manktelow. “The Rise and Demise of Missionary Wives,” *Journal of Women's History* 26, no. 1 (2014): 135–159, DOI:10.1353/jowh.2014.0011. Clare Midgley, “Can Women Be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006). Elizabeth Prevost, “Married to the Mission Field: Gender, Christianity, and Professionalization in Britain and Colonial Africa, 1865-1914,” *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 4 (2008): 796–826.

local domestic spaces was increasingly accepted, as they were viewed as less politically threatening in colonial contexts. Few women, however, were able to travel alone to West African missions compared with later missions to East and South Africa, or Asia.[84] Unlike the rare independent female explorers who traversed the African continent during this period,[85] most women who participated in West African missions did so within the CMS institutional framework.

Despite this, the role of women as "missionaries" and institutional leaders was largely rendered invisible compared with that of male missionaries. Women in early nineteenth-century missionary societies primarily served as wives and mothers to their missionary husbands, acting as models of family life, educators, and assistants. As internal debates within London mission societies addressed the challenges of marrying African women, the role of British missionary wives expanded. Although men faced pressure to bring their wives to their stations across the empire in order to uphold the morality of both missionaries and settlers, women remained formally excluded from the core functions of missionary work.[86] As Midgley notes, "only men could become the salaried employees of foreign missionary societies; and only men could

[84] In the regions of East and South Asia and the Pacific, the CMS promoted women's participation more actively than in West African missions. Some institutions, including the Female Education in the East (FES) and the China Inland Mission, were created to train and support single women missionaries, encouraging the publication of periodicals such as the *Female Missionary Intelligencer* (1854–1899), *Daybreak* (1886–1918), and *India's Women* (1881–1957). See Michelle Tusan, "Gleaners in the Holy Land: Women and the Missionary Press in Victorian Britain," *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, no. 6.2 (2010); Elizabeth Prevost, "Assessing Women, Gender, and Empire in Britain's Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Movement," *History Compass*, no. 7 (2009): 765–799; Clare Midgley, "Can Women Be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006); Elizabeth Prevost, "Married to the Mission Field," 796–826.

[85] On European women explorers in Africa, see Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (Macmillan, 1897) and *West African Studies* (1899); and Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 102–115, on May French-Sheldon's 1891 expedition. Both figures challenged patriarchal conventions while reinforcing racial and imperial hierarchies, underscoring the contrast with the institutional and constrained roles available to women within the CMS missionary framework in West Africa.

[86] Manktelow, "The Rise and Demise of Missionary Wives."

perform that primary component of a missionary's role, preaching."[87] Missionary women, whether married or single, were officially prohibited from preaching and direct conversion activities. However, from the mid to late nineteenth century, they gradually assumed a wider range of roles *as de facto* missionaries, finding ways to influence within the institutional limits imposed on them.

Between 1820 and 1890, approximately 53 women of German and British origin, aged between 22 and 38, worked in missions in Sierra Leone. Of the 22, we have letters and journals addressed to the CMS headquarters.[88] One notable example was Julia Sass, the first single professional woman to sail to work in British missions as an institutional director.[89] Most women arrived after 1840; only four travelled to the region between 1820 and 1830. Approximately thirty-three settled in Sierra Leone during 1820–1894, while seventeen worked in the Yoruba Mission between 1879 and 1894, serving in institutions such as the Liberated African Schools, the CMS Female Institute (now the Annie Walsh Institute), the Female Institute in Lagos, and the Abeokuta mission. Most were wives, daughters, or sisters of missionaries, with service lengths ranging from a few months to three years. They joined missions before or after marriage, and some returned after becoming widows. Only five women served for approximately eighteen years or more: Mary Beale, Sophia Hehlen, Julia Emily Sass, Sabina Peter Clemens, and Jane Caspari.[90]

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[87] Clare Midgley, "Can Women Be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 339.
[88] West Africa Mission 1820-1880: Miss Anna Pope, CA1 0177, Miss Anne, Hannah Nylander CA1 O167, Annie Catherine Ilott, CA1 O119, Annie Freymuth CA1 O95, Beatrice Mary Cartmann O66, Elizabeth Adcok 026, Hannah Elizabeth Thomas O210, Henrietta Elise Konig O136, Jane Caspari O67, Jane Schemel O191, Julia Sass O187, Sophia Hehlen O114, Maria Roberts Brierley O54, Maria Roberts Bywater O62, Mary Anne Taylor O208, Mary Beale O38, Eliza Wilkinson O224, Mary Shoard O197, Sabina Peters Clemens O72, Sarah Heighway O116.
[89] Leach, "African Girls, Nineteenth century," 339.
[90] Church Missionary Society, "Female missionaries," *Register of Missionaries, from 1804-1894* (Printed by Gilbert and Rivington, Ld., s.f.), 260–296. See Appendix D.

Illustration 3.3. Christ Church, Pademba Road, Kissey, Sierra Leone



Source: *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1881, 107.

In the 1867 issue of *Coral Magazine*, a missionary wife published an article titled "Voyage to Lagos, and work to do there." The article is not signed by her, but we know her name because she mentioned her husband's name. It was written from the Mission House in Lagos on January 5th, 1867. On their way from England, Mrs. Lamb and Mr. Lamb stopped at Sierra Leone, where they had the opportunity to visit Mrs. Beale, another missionary wife stationed in Sierra Leone, and the female institution, about which she states that "This is a magnificent building, and Miss Sass is one of a thousand, I should think. I hope someday to have a female institution in Lagos. It is really much needed."[91] The important work that the schoolmistress did in Freetown will be replicated later in Lagos.

In 1851, the Diocese of Sierra Leone was established under the leadership of the European bishop Dr. Vidal. A decade later, it became administratively independent, assuming responsibility for supporting its pastors, churches, and schools, with the assistance of a small

[91] *Coral Missionary Magazine*, April 1, 1867, 51.

subsidy from the CMS. The Society continued to fund *Fourah Bay College*, the Grammar School, and the Female Institute. These institutions enabled more young Africans, sons of clergy and traders from Sierra Leone, to graduate not only from Fourah Bay but also from Oxford and Cambridge. According to CMS records, by 1884, approximately fifty African clergymen had been ordained along the West African coast, including Yoruba and Nigerian clergy.[92] Among them, Samuel Adjai Crowther stands out. In 1864, as noted earlier, he became the first African bishop of the Anglican Church and the first to be ordained in England. He was appointed to the Diocese of the Niger, marking a decisive shift toward the greater involvement of African clergy in the Yoruba and Niger missions.

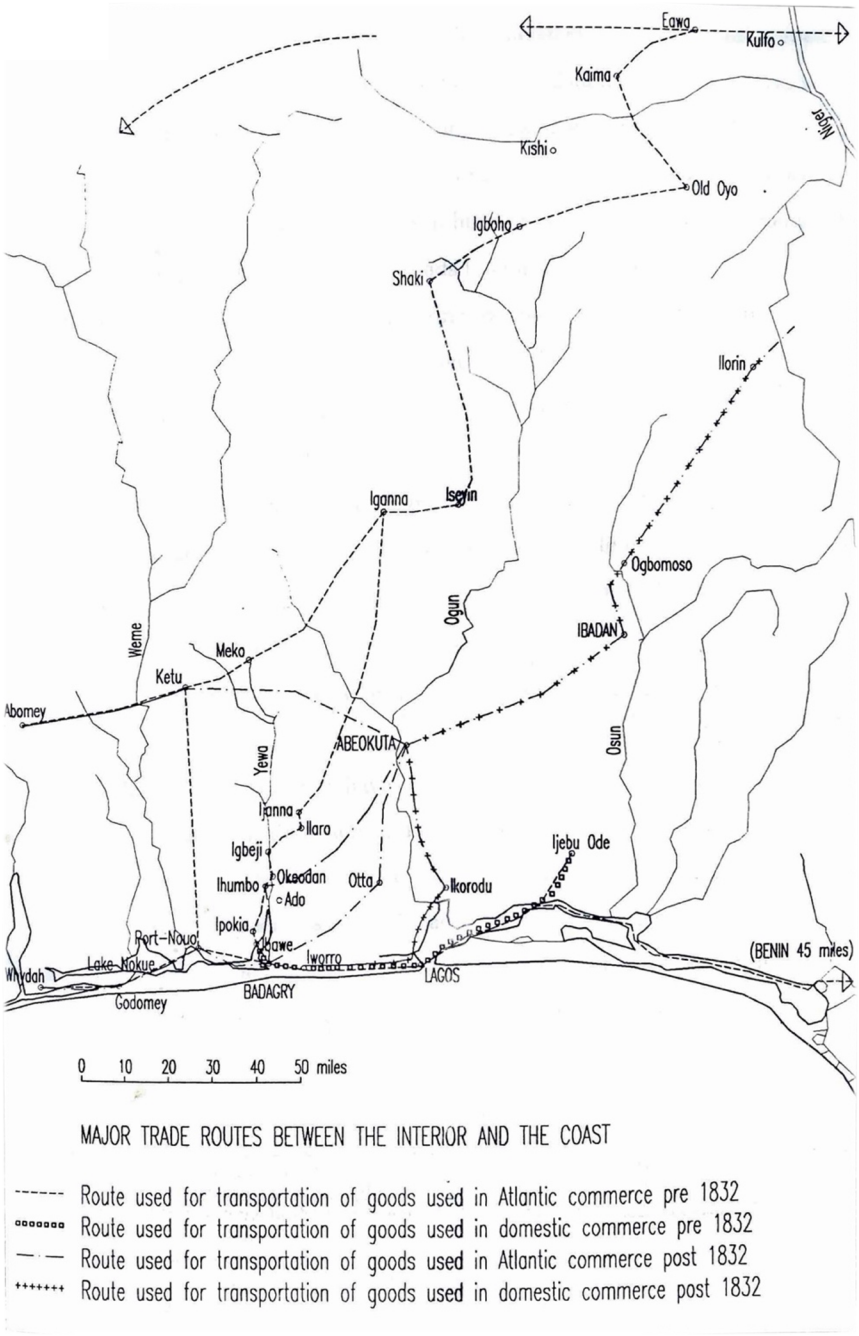
b. Expansion from Freetown to Bight of Benin

Approximately 1,600 kilometres east of Sierra Leone, in Nigeria, the Yoruba Mission was established, comprising a large number of individuals who had returned as "Liberated Africans." By the 1840s, many of them, already converted to Christianity and engaged in independent trade, sought to return to their homelands. This led to the establishment of Church Missionary Society missions on the coast at Badagry and Lagos, as well as in Abeokuta, Ibadan, and other inland locations. These missions were led for many years by Townsend, Hinderer, S. Crowther, and other missionaries.[93] Figure 3.11 below identifies the principal settlements and internal trade routes used to transport goods for Atlantic or domestic commerce between the main coastal cities, Badagry and Lagos, and the interior at Abeokuta and Ibadan. The map distinguishes between routes operating before and after 1832, a moment in the reorganization of

[92] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 2.
[93] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album,* vol 1, 12.

West African trade networks following the intensification of British abolitionist pressure on the Atlantic slave trade.

Figure 3.11. Map. Major trade routes between the interior and the coast



Source: Caroline Sorensen, "Badagry 1784-1863. The Political and Commercial History of a Pre-Colonial Lagoonside Community in Southwest Nigeria" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Stirling, 1995), 61.

The founding of Abeokuta took place at the beginning of the nineteenth century, during a period of intense conflict in the Yoruba region, commonly referred to as the "era of confusion."[94] This designation reflects the turmoil experienced by communities devastated by internal conflicts, including family fragmentation, large-scale displacement, and radical changes in social norms.[95] The city-state of Abeokuta was established between 1827 and 1829 and recognized as a political formation that emerged following the collapse of the Oyo Empire and the subsequent conflicts.[96]

The new settlement was located in a mountainous area now known as Olumo Rock, which offered refuge from the slave raiders of Ibadan and Dahomey.[97] The name Abeokuta literally means "under the rock." The Egba people, who had previously lived in small communities governed by local obas and councils of chiefs, were displaced after nearly all their towns were destroyed between 1823 and 1824 by a coalition of Ife, Ijebu, and Oyo forces.[98] As a result, the Egba kingdom was left in ruins and its population scattered. Abeokuta then became the principal center for the resettlement of displaced Egba communities. Among its inhabitants were also numerous survivors from Owu, who constituted a fourth ethnic group within the new city.[99] The population grew rapidly with the arrival of "Liberated Africans" from Sierra Leone, accompanied by missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).[100] In the next image from *Gleaner*, we see a depiction of Olumo Rock in Abeokuta.

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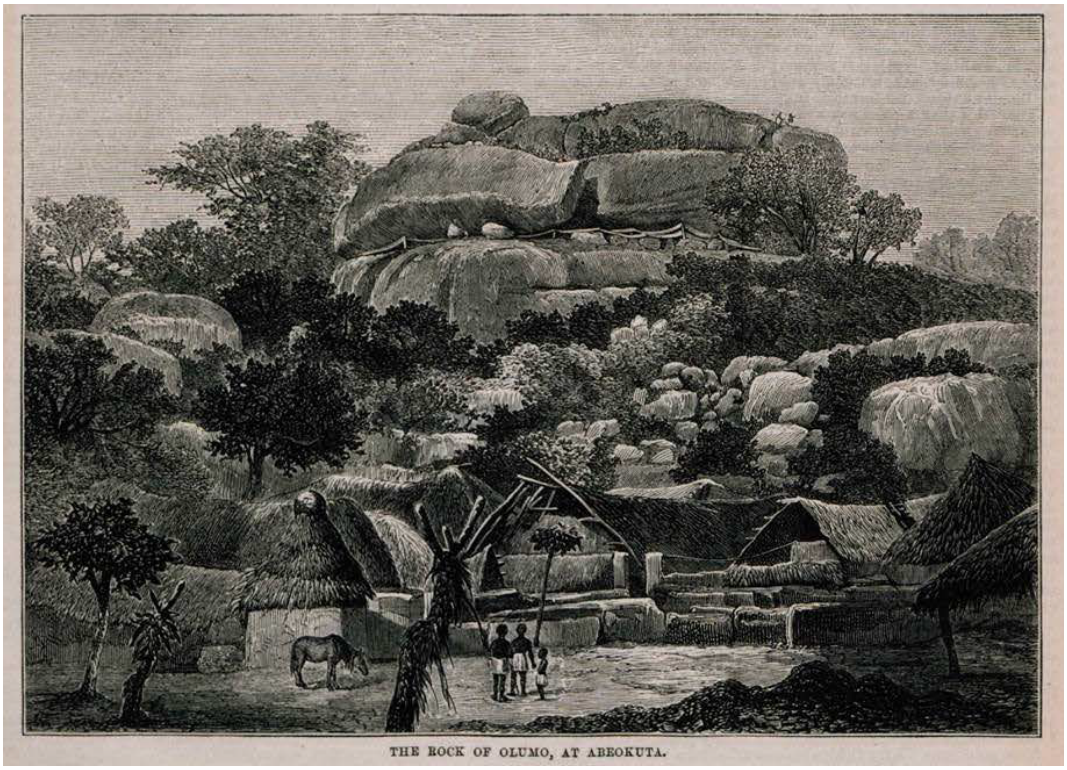
[94] J. D.Y. Peel, *Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba* (Indiana University Press, 2000), 48.
[95] Peel, *Religious encounter and the making*, 50
[96] Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours,* 12–14. Peel, *Religious encounter and the making*, 37; Benjamina Efua Dadzie, "Collecting Abeokuta: Tracing the Provenance of Egba Material Culture from the Church Missionary Society Yoruba Mission," *Material Religion*, 21, no. 3, (2025), 271.
[97] Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, 31–33.
[98] Peel, *Religious encounter and the making*, 33; Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, 8–9.
[99] Peel, *Religious encounter and the making*, 37–38.
[100] Dadzie, "Collecting Abeokuta: Tracing," 275; Peel, *Religious encounter and the making*, 124.

Illustration 3.4. The Rock of Olumo, at Abeokuta



Source: *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1878, 46.

The city was organized as a "federation of communities" within a single wall, preserving the original identities of its founders. Refugees reconstituted their former villages, which became the neighbourhoods of the new city, while retaining their identities, customs, religions, and traditional chieftaincies. The political structure took the form of a military oligarchy headed by the pan-Egba organization (under the command of the ologun, or war chiefs), led by the military leader Sodeke, whose importance was steadily increasing.[101]

By 1840, many large population centres had developed in southern and central Yorubaland, such as Abeokuta, along with other significant towns founded by displaced refugee groups, including Ibadan, Oyo, and Ijaye. As Akintoye noted, the foundation of Abeokuta was

[101] Peel, *Religious encounter and the making,* 38.

established in conflict with the Ijebu, who resented and feared the prospect of increasing Egba competition in coastal trade. Since many towns of the Osun Valley (e.g., Iwo, Ede, Ejigbo, Ikirun), northern Ijesa towns (e.g., Osogbo, Igbajo, Otan, Ada), some Ife towns (e.g., Ikire, Gbongan), and Modakeke had their populations increase beyond their capacities due to people displaced by the civil disturbance in Yorubaland.[102]

c. CMS expansion to the interior of the Bight of Benin and the Niger River

1. Aku, Saro - The Egba: first returnees (1839)

By 1839, successful Aku merchants in Freetown had acquired vessels to trade with the Bight of Benin. Anderson notes that "What it meant to be Aku was further shaped by the opening of commercial links back with coastal Yorubaland from the late 1830s onward..."[103] In Sierra Leone, Yoruba speakers adopted a wider linguistic and political identity as Aku, while still maintaining markers and memories of their more specific homelands, as evidenced by language, scarification, and references to "subethnic" groups such as Oyo, Egba, Ìjèṣà, and Ijebu.

Although the British government did not fund these efforts, it did not prevent recaptives from trading and emigrating. The first voyage departed Freetown on April 1, 1839, carrying sixty-seven passengers destined for Badagry. Between October 25, 1839, and April 30, 1841, five voyages from Freetown sailed to "Badagry and the Leeward Coast," transporting 273 emigrants. According to Anderson, "In July 1844, Lieutenant-Governor Fergusson reported to

[102] S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840–1893* (Humanities Press, 1971); S. A. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Amalion Publishing, 2010).
[103] Richard Peter Anderson, "Religion, Return, and the Making of the Aku," in *Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*, 192–226. African Identities: Past and Present (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 195.

Lord Stanley that between 600 and 800 persons, "Liberated Africans" from Sierra Leone, are now established in the Yarriba or Aku country."[104]

In a letter dated November 24th, 1841, from the Rev. Thomas Dove, we find the following account about this movement. "The liberated Africans have no desire to leave their native soil. Hundreds have already left our colony for Badagry… and hundreds more are on the tip-toe. They are begging us to send a missionary with them to Badagry. The Akus have purchased two prized vessels (capture slavers), and they are just about to purchase a third."[105]

The "Liberated Africans" started a subscription among themselves to fund the movement of missionaries to their homeland through the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Their contributions varied, with one giving seven guineas, another five, some two, and others one. They raised nearly seventy-five pounds in the beginning. Dove closed the letter, "I hope, this year exceed one hundred pounds. Thanks the Lord, Sierra Leone has not yet proved to be a failure."[106]

Saro, as an Egba term, refers to their children who returned from Sierra Leone; the term has been broadened beyond its local meaning to include not only those who returned to Abeokuta. It also comprises the movement of Yoruba-dominated immigrants from Sierra Leone back to their ancestral lands in Yorubaland and other areas on the Niger River, including the Niger Delta and Calabar. By 1846, roughly two thousand Egba returnees had travelled to the new Egba capital, Abeokuta. Others went further to Ibadan, Ijaye, Iseyin, Ilesha, and Ijebu, as well as to "towns and little villages as far away as Ede, Iragbiji, and Ilorin" and other parts of Nigeria.[107]

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[104] Richard Peter Anderson, "Religion, Return, and the Making of the Aku." Chapter. *In Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*, 192–226. African Identities: Past and Present (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 195–196

[105] Friend of Africa, "Emigration from Sierra Leone to Badagry," *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, no. 12 (1842), 293.

[106] Friend of Africa, "Emigration from Sierra Leone to Badagry," 294.

[107] Jacob F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1881: The Making of a New Elite* (Longman, 1965), 40, 41. To expand on: Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The Sierra Leonians in Yoruba 1830–*

Among the returnees were Hausa, Nupe, Shabe, Eki, Bassa, and Igala, many of them settled in Lagos and Badagry because their original towns had been destroyed, ongoing wars prevented them from returning, or they could not find relatives.[108]

The earliest groups of Saro emigrants, before moving to Badagry, Abeokuta, or Lagos, urged the Sierra Leone government and missionaries to accompany them with missionary agents and teachers and to extend their influence in their homelands. All these people, as much as they wanted to search for and connect with their relatives and ancestral homes, also wanted to find wives and start families. However, the Saro were not a uniform social group. They were divided by status, aspiration, and, particularly during the Yoruba wars, by ethnic affiliation. Alongside the highly educated elite, they brought back home their skills and occupations, such as masonry, carpentry, barbery, tailoring, baking, and small-scale trading.[109] The majority of the returnees belonged to the lower classes, some with no education or only basic schooling.

A few highly successful Yoruba traders pooled their resources to buy condemned slave ships. After they began trading as far south as Badagry and eventually reached the Niger Delta, they became pioneers of this homebound movement. They offered transportation to other small-scale traders and aspiring migrants, and were among the first Sierra Leoneans of Yoruba, Hausa, and Nupe descent to meet their relatives in Badagry, to establish connections, and to send and receive messages from their Egba homeland. As Crowther states in his reports: "…where many of the Egba people met each other again; some found their children, others their brothers and

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1890 (University of Wisconsin Press, 1965). Adeyemi B. Aderibigbe and J. F. A. Ajayi, eds., *Lagos: The Development of an African City* (Longman Nigeria, 1975).

[108] Femi J. Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, African History*, 2. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.762,

[109] Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 27.

sisters (…) Several of them have gone into the interior altogether. Others in this colony have messages sent to them by their parents and relations whom the traders met at Badagry."[110]

Reports from traders about Sierra Leoneans reuniting with relatives and receiving warm welcomes encouraged more potential migrants to consider moving. Also, in churches and parishes, during prayers and meetings, "Liberated Africans" request their support for volunteers willing to take the Gospel back to their communities. This movement was associated with the preparation of the Niger expedition, which received tremendous publicity in Sierra Leone. They moved to seek work opportunities created by the expanding interests of the British, who opened positions in missionary work, commerce, consulates, transportation, and policing. The Saro aimed to participate in international commerce in the port cities, using their skills, education, and professional qualifications as "Sierra Leoneans." They explored their connections to serve their overseas import and export business, maintaining links with a network of markets and palm oil production zones in the hinterland.[111]

Sarah Tucker notes that from 1839 to 1842, no fewer than 500 individuals left the colony, including over 300 who headed to Badagry, most of whom continued on to Abeokuta.[112] According to Kopytoff's published estimate, between 200 and 300 recaptives lived in Abeokuta by 1842, increasing to 3,000 by 1850.[113] The commercial and political interests of the Saro conflicted with those of the British consular and trading expatriate groups in Abeokuta. Kolapo argues that this confrontation, led by a significant section of the Saro elite

[110] Samuel Crowther. CA1 079 7 Extracts for the Quarter Ending June 25th, 1841.
[111] The Saro moved to the Oil Rivers, Cameroons, Fernando Po, Opobo, and Warri, where they were actively involved in trade, gathering and consolidating goods for sale to Europeans. Additionally, similar to Lagos, some Saros began exporting products directly to England. This development raised concerns among European traders because the Saros operated on narrow profit margins that were not sustainable for British merchants. Femi J. Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, African History,* 12–13.
[112] Sarah Tucker, *Abbeokuta; or Sunrise within the Tropics: An Outline of the Origin and Progress of the Yoruba Mission* (Robert Carter and Brothers, 1854), 45–48.
[113] Kopytoff, *Preface to Modern Nigeria*, 50–51.

in Abeokuta, eventually encouraged early anti-British nationalist sentiments in what would become Nigeria. In 1864, Consul Freeman complained about hostile Saro activities, and this opposition ultimately resulted in the expulsion of Europeans, both missionary and secular, from the Egba capital three years later.[114]

Lagos in the 1850s, like Freetown, presented Victorian characteristics, primarily shaped by the immigrant, Saro-educated, and professional elite. They also played an important role in expanding palm oil exports, since some had already gained valuable commercial experience in Sierra Leone and quite a few brought substantial capital with them to Lagos. Examples of Saro traders included Walter Lewis, James Pinson Labulo Davies, and his brother. All were educated at CMS Grammar School in Freetown and apprenticed aboard Royal Navy ships. Several of them purchased condemned slave ships and operated trade routes between Freetown and the Niger Delta. Later, Davies settled permanently in Lagos in 1862, where they shipped goods directly to England and received European-manufactured goods in exchange.[115] The Davies family was prominent among the Saro community, composed of "Liberated Africans" who settled in colonial Lagos after completing indentures in Sierra Leone. J.P.L. Davies married Sarah Bonetta Forbes[116] in 1862 and spent most of their adult life in Lagos. Davies became one of the wealthiest merchants, owning extensive property, including his own pier at the marina. Their family home was located beside St. Paul's Church, built over a former slave barracoon near a Breadfruit plantation. By 1876, however, Bonetta's husband was involved in lawsuits over financial fraud, which led to bankruptcy.[117]

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[114] Femi J. Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," 13.
[115] Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," 11.
[116] Henry B. Lovejoy, *Becoming Sarah Bonetta. A Yorùbá Woman in Queen Victoria's Court* (University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).
[117] Lovejoy, *Becoming Sarah Bonetta*, 4. Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies*, 135–63.

The Saro were part of the introduction of Christianity and literacy to Yorubaland, Lokoja, Onitsha, Bonny, and Calabar. When Samuel Crowther and C. A. Gollmer went for the first time to Badagry, and then to Abeokuta, they were accompanied by Saro missionary pioneers: William Marsh and Edward Philips, native catechists; Mark Willoughby, an interpreter; and also, with several carpenters and labourers. Then, Henry Townsend went to Abeokuta, accompanied by Andrew Wilhelm and John M. Cormack, both Saro missionary agents. And in Lagos, Ibadan, Oyo, Iseyin, and Ijaye, wherever the CMS and other missions established churches and started schools, they were staffed by educated and trained Saro clergy, catechists, schoolmasters, interpreters, and others. The Christianization of the Niger Delta city-states, led by Crowther, was achieved with the aid of Saro agents.[118]

The operation of the Niger Mission stations, especially those in Gbebe and Lokoja, depended on the services of Sierra Leoneans, many of whom were Saro. The movement into the upper reaches of the Lower Niger was initiated by the 1857 expedition led by W. Balfour Baikie. During this expedition, they explored the Benue River, signed treaties against slavery, and promoted British commerce and Christian missionary interests. Lokoja served as a commercial hub and administrative centre for extending British influence inland, and at Onitsha, under the guidance of Rev. Samuel Crowther, J. C. Taylor, of Igbo descent, established a mission station among his people.[119]

According to Kolapo, Crowther emphasized the importance of including an Industrial House, Industrial Agents, and an Industrial Institution as essential components alongside the 'gospel' to address slavery in Africa. During his episcopate, his mission stations at Onitsha, Iddah (before its closure), and Lokoja consistently employed an industrial agent. These agents,

[118] Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," 19.
[119] Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," 19.

skilled in trades such as brickmaking, bricklaying, carpentry, sewing, or cotton ginning, were tasked with teaching local communities modern techniques and production methods to enhance the value of their products. He also promoted connecting their local production to broader regional and global markets.[120]

2. Niger River Expeditions

The Niger expeditions should be seen as part of a broader pattern involving missionary goals, imperial strategies, and scientific research that shaped British involvement in West Africa during the nineteenth century. The first major expedition, launched in 1841 under the leadership of Reverend J. F. Schön, a German missionary and linguist, and accompanied by Samuel Crowther, then serving as a catechist, represented a concerted effort by the British government to explore the interior of the Bight of Benin via the Niger and Benue rivers. To achieve this, three vessels, the Albert, Wilberforce, and Sudan, were commissioned under the auspices of Prince Albert and Lord John Russell.[121] Despite these significant logistical efforts, the expedition ended in disaster due to the high mortality rate from yellow fever.[122] As Dike concisely noted, "The 1841 expedition became a byword for hopeless failure."[123]

This initial failure, however, did not discourage subsequent efforts; instead, it urged a reassessment of both strategy and personnel. In 1854, a second expedition was launched with continued support from the British government and the Church Missionary Society (CMS),

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[120] Kolapo, "The Saro of West Africa," 18.
[121] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1881, 91. Schön, James Frederick, and Samuel Crowther. *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, on Behalf of the Church Missionary Society* (Hatchard and Son, 1842).
[122] A letter from Ascension, dated February 7, 1942, was sent by Captain Allen reporting the "African fever" that several of the officers and crew were experiencing and the intention to renew the expedition first to Fernando Po, and then to Niger. Friend of Africa, "Partial renewal of the Niger Expedition," *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, no. 12 (1842), 293.
[123] K. Onwuka Dike, *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841–1891*. A paper read at the Centenary of the Mission at Christ Church, Onitsha, on 13 November 1957 (Published for the C.M.S. Niger Mission by the Ibadan University Press, 1962).

featuring Crowther now as an ordained and experienced missionary alongside Dr. Baikie. This expedition saw relatively greater success, partly because of the adoption of quinine to prevent malaria and less reliance on European missionaries, whose susceptibility to tropical diseases had been noted in 1841.[124]

The growing influence of African agents represented a major shift in missionary expansion strategies. While the second attempt proved more successful, partly due to quinine and less European missionary participation, the Niger Mission was only founded in Onitsha in 1857. This occurred when Crowther navigated the river for a third time, now under the Society's commission to set up a lasting Niger Mission.[125]

The early years of the Niger Mission were nonetheless marked by considerable logistical and environmental challenges. African teachers, who formed the backbone of the mission, were stationed in scattered settlements along the riverbanks, often enduring long periods of isolation with only occasional contact from Crowther or other missionaries. Travel along the Niger remained dangerous and unpredictable. In 1857, for example, Crowther was shipwrecked about 400 miles from the coast and detained there for an entire year. Similarly, between 1859 and 1861, a full two years passed without any vessel available to carry him upriver, highlighting the fragility of communication and supply lines in the region.[126]

By the late nineteenth century, however, these conditions had undergone significant transformation. Advances in river transport and the expansion of commercial networks facilitated more regular navigation along the Niger. Trading steamers increasingly crossed the river,

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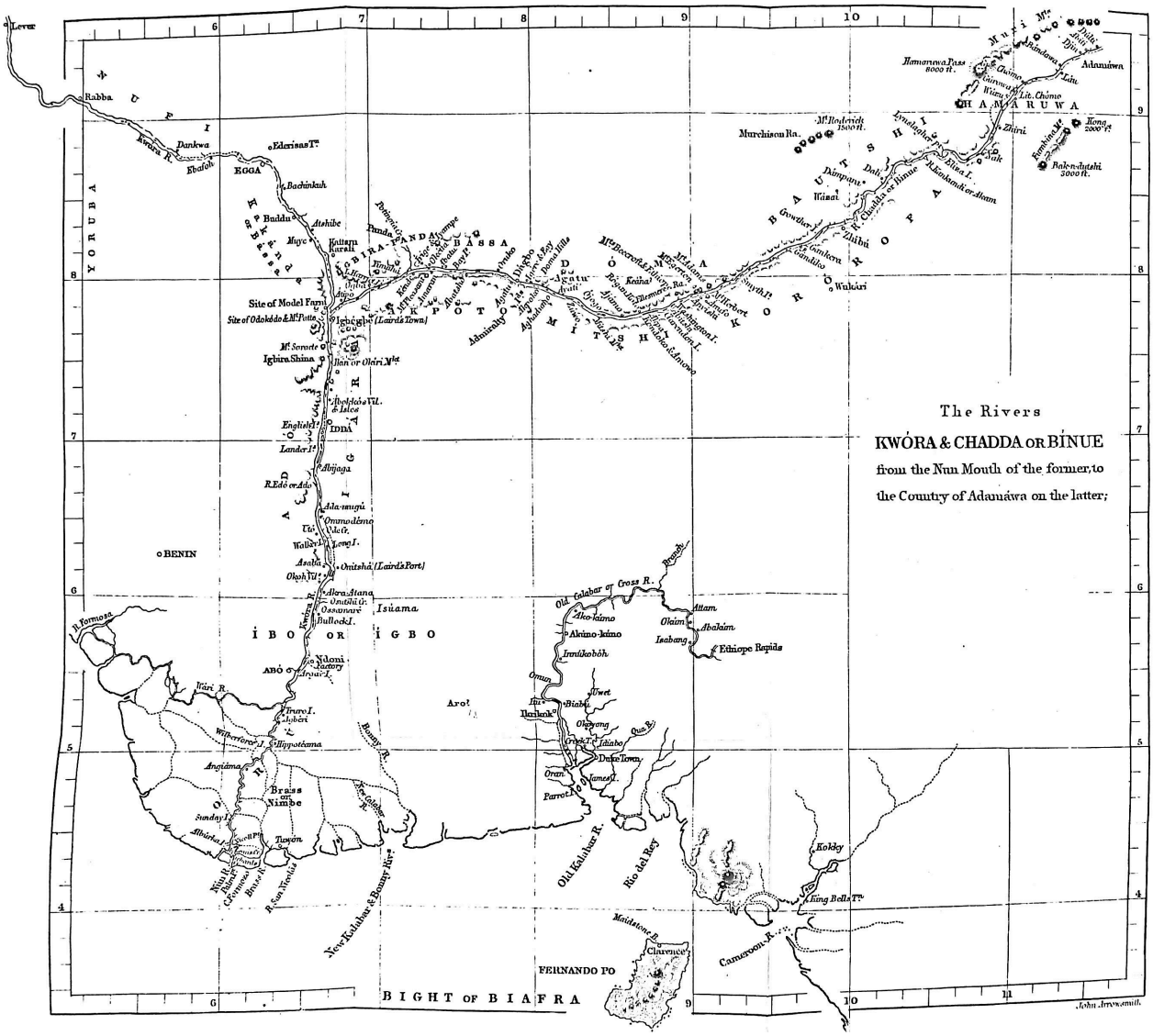
[124] Samuel Adjai Crowther. *Journal of an expedition up the Niger and Tshadda rivers undertaken by Macgregor Laird in connection with the British Government in 1854* (Church Missionary House, 1855).
[125] Samuel Crowther, John Christopher Taylor. *The Gospel on the banks of the Niger: journals and notices of the native missionaries accompanying the Niger expedition of 1857-1859* (Church Missionary House, Salisbury square, 1859).
[126] Onwuka Dike, *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841–1891*, a paper read at the Centenary of the Mission at Christ Church, Onitsha, 13 November 1957.

carrying manufactured goods from England into the interior and returning with local produce for export. This expanding commercial infrastructure was centred on a series of strategic trading posts established along the river, including Onitsha, Lokoja (located at the confluence of the Niger and Benue), and Egan, situated about 320 miles inland from the coast. These developments not only improved the viability of missionary activities but also more closely integrated the Niger region into the circuits of Atlantic commerce and imperial influence.[127]

[127] Samuel Crowther, *The River Niger: a paper read before the Royal Geographical Society, June 11th, 1877: and a brief account of missionary operations carried on under the superintendence of Bishop Crowther in the Niger Territory* (Church Missionary House, 1877).

Figure 3.12. Map. Niger River Expedition 1857, 1859



Source: Samuel Crowther, The Gospel of the Banks of the Niger. Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries. Niger Expedition 1857-1859 (Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968).

3. Badagry

In January 1845, a CMS mission arrived in Badagry with the aim of proceeding to Abeokuta. The group was composed of Reverend H. Townsend and his wife, Sarah Pearse; Samuel Crowther and his wife, Susan Thompson (a teacher of Yoruba origin), with two children; Reverend C. A. Gollmer and his wife, Eliza Phillips (a missionary in Kissey); two schoolteachers

from Sierra Leone, Messrs. Mash and Phillips; an interpreter, Mark Willoughby, with his wife and three children; four carpenters; three laborers; and two servants.[128] However, due to the death of Sodeke, the Egba leader, his funeral, and the resulting political instability, it was decided to postpone the journey to Abeokuta for a year and a half.

The infrastructure created by the Methodist Church facilitated the installation of the CMS. By mid-year, the CMS had already built a church and a mission house in Badagry, like the gun. This attracted congregants, primarily from Sierra Leone, but not necessarily the inhabitants from Badagry itself. In an effort to engage the local community, they "took the gospel to the heart of Badagry's commercial life, preaching to the women who worked in the market."[129] Nevertheless, they encountered difficulties in retaining congregants, and church attendance fluctuated significantly. C. A. Gollmer was left in charge of the Badagry mission, while Townsend and Crowther departed for Abeokuta in 1846.

By 1849, the number of students had risen from 19 to 49, including the children of local chiefs. Unlike in Abeokuta, where conversions and congregant numbers grew more rapidly, developments in Badagry followed a different trajectory. According to Sorensen, the main challenges the CMS faced in retaining and attracting local congregants were "Mahometanism, idolatry, and the slave trade." Only new migrants or visiting groups from Abeokuta and Sierra Leone approached the mission. While the palm oil trade expanded in Badagry, kidnapping and human trafficking continued to operate.[130] Christian doctrine also called for dismantling Badagry's political and economic structures and abolishing the slave trade.[131]

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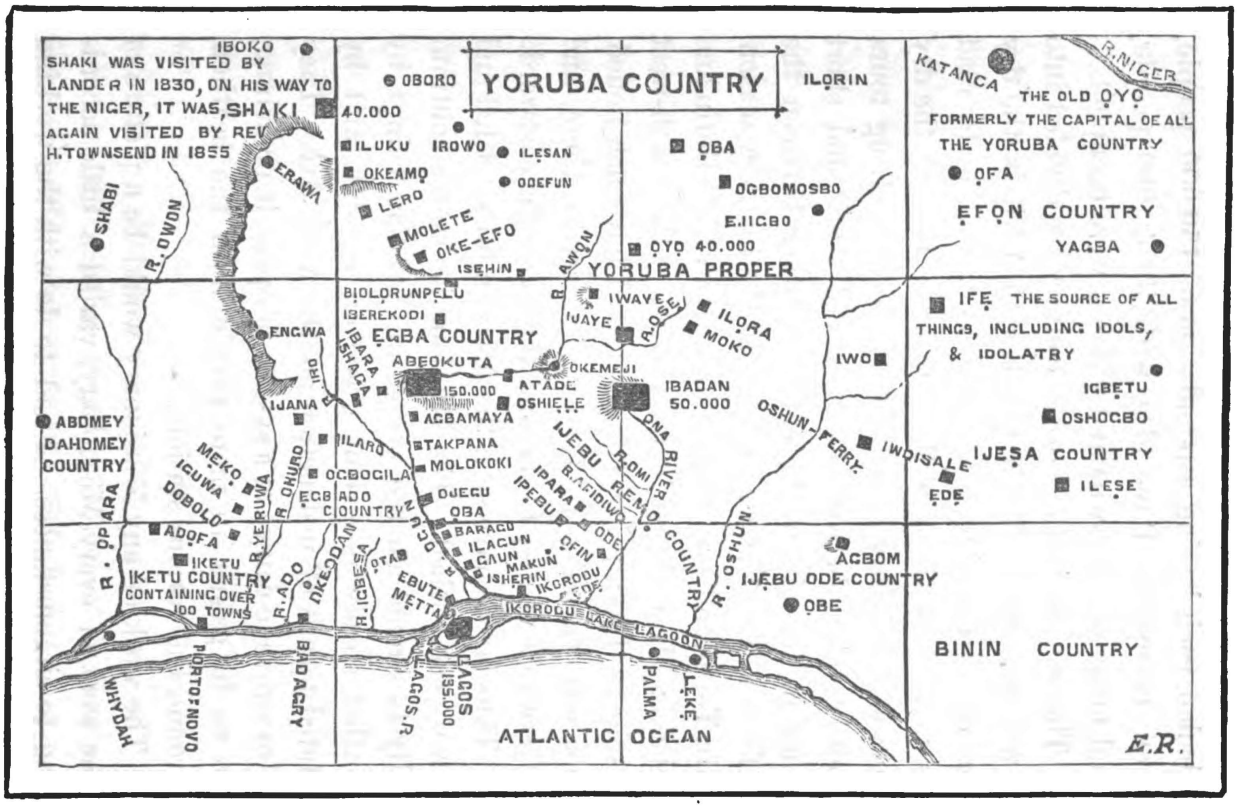
[128] Caroline Sorensen, "Badagry 1784–1863. The Political and Commercial History of a Pre-Colonial Lagoonside Community in Southwest Nigeria" (Ph.D. Thesis University of Stirling, 1995), 233.
[129] Sorensen, "Badagry 1784–1863," 235.
[130] FO 881 36 21, Report by Consul Brand on the Trade of Lagos for the year 1859. Sorensen, "Badagry 1784–1863," 252.
[131] Sorensen, "Badagry 1784-1863," 247.

4. Foundation of Yoruba Mission (1845)

According to reports from the *British Foreign Missions* describing the mission's origins, "some of the converts bought a vessel and went on a trading expedition along the Slave Coast as far as Badagry. This resulted in opening up communication with Abeokuta, and (…) the commencement by the Church Missionary Society of a mission in the Yoruba country was decided on."[132] In 1846, the mission in Abeokuta was finally established, and later, in 1852, the missionaries moved toward Lagos and Ibadan. The wars and constant internal disputes between Ibadan and Abeokuta in 1862 disrupted local trade routes. However, missionaries continued to advance their efforts to reach neighbouring territories and establish interconnected CMS stations. In this way, they occupied Bonny between 1865 and 1866.[133] The next map was included in Rev. Roper's missionary publication.[134] In the main cities, including Abeokuta, Ibadan and Lagos, he provides approximate populations, and for others, such as Ife, Shaki, Old Oyo, Oyo and Iketu, he offers specific details he considers important to acknowledge. For example, next to Ife, he writes "the source of all things, including idols and idolatry," and in the middle of the map close to Oyo, "Yoruba proper," which reflects his prejudices against the Orisa religion and against people in general.

[132] Thompson R., Wardlaw and Arthur N. Johnson. *British Foreign Missions 1837–1897* (Blackie & Son Ltd., 1899), 84.
[133] Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Adeniyi Oroge, "The Institution of Slavery in Yorubaland with special reference to the 19th Century" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1971). Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*.
[134] E. Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions in West Africa, Facts from Abeokuta*. Part 2. no. 4 (William Hunt and Company, 1869), 5.

Figure 3.13. Map. (Sketch) Yoruba Country by Rev. Edward Roper, 1869.



Source: E. Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions in West Africa, Facts from Abeokuta*. Part 2. no. 4 (William Hunt and Company, 1869), 5.

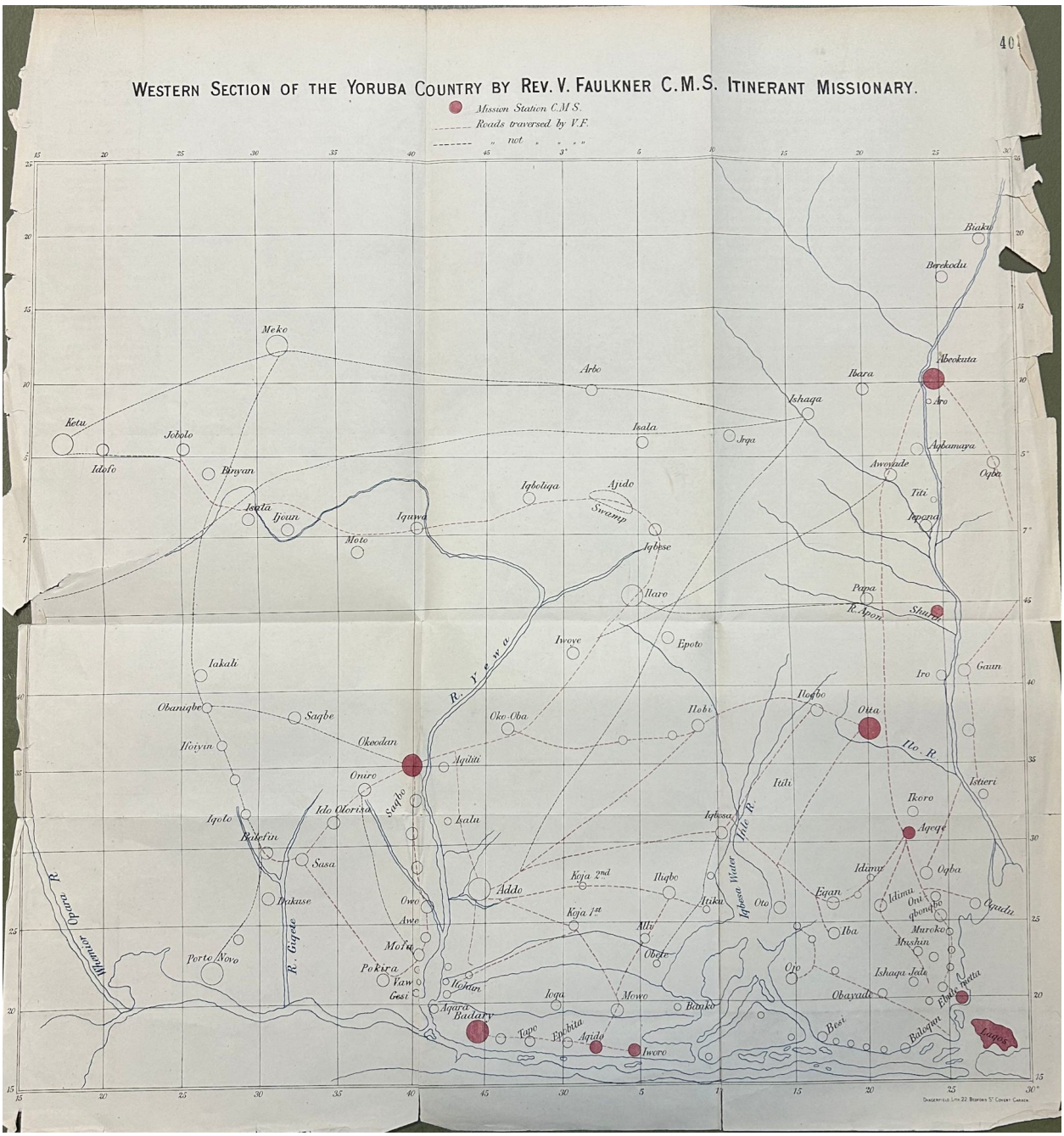
In 1867, however, a new crisis struck Abeokuta: the mission facilities were destroyed, and European missionaries were expelled from the city.[135] The mission was entrusted to local clergy and a Christian community of approximately 3,000 people, including 998 committed, practicing converts. It was not until 1875 that Reverend Townsend was able to return. Despite the seven-year absence of European missionaries, the local Church grew stronger. The following year, Reverend James Johnson, an African clergyman, was appointed superintendent of the Yoruba Mission.[136]

[135] Edward Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions*, 20.
[136] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 12. *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1876, 96.

These were turbulent times, and invasions of Yoruba towns continued throughout the nineteenth century. Abeokuta was repeatedly attacked by the king of Dahomey, though without success. Christian missionaries also participated in the defence of the town. Nevertheless, many settlements were devastated and CMS infrastructure destroyed; some towns disappeared altogether, severely affecting life within them. Among the principal challenges faced by missionaries in this region were polygamy[137] and domestic slavery, practices that the CMS wanted to eradicate. Although the region also experienced years of continuous warfare and attacks stemming from rivalries among local chiefs, peace was eventually restored in 1887. The Faulkner map, unlike Roper's map (sketch), showed only the western part of the "Yoruba Country," highlighting the main mission stations and the communication routes from the interior to the coastal missions or stations. Both maps showed the main rivers that crossed the territory, the proximity of towns and villages, and the location of the main cities discussed in this research.

[137] Lambeth Palace Archive. LC34. no. 2. Letters addressing questions related to polygamy and marriage from C. Gollmer and Crowther to the Bishop of Exeter. Notes on the life of polygamy in West Africa by Crowther. Meeting with a chief discussing health and marital issues. Crowther's advice to follow God's orders, "who in wisdom appointed one woman to each man… though his case was irremediate yet for the benefit of his health, he gave him some port wine. This was one case of excess which came to our notice." 5.

Figure 3.14. Map. Western Section of the Yoruba Country by Rev. Faulkner



Source: National Archive, Kew, CO 879/15/25, March 19, 1879.

5. The British Occupation in Lagos

As for Lagos, which had served as a central port in the slave trade, it was transformed in the nineteenth century into a strategic center for new British imperial policies. Lagos, like

Badagry, is located on the Bight of Benin and has been an essential port for British trade since the eighteenth century. About 410,796 people from the coast and interior were enslaved and shipped during the period 1801-1850.[138] This transformation resulted from a gradual process in which abolitionist objectives, geopolitical considerations, and new economic interests converged. British military intervention was initially justified by the "moral and political imperative to eradicate the slave trade." Under this rationale, in December 1851, HMS *Bloodhound* bombarded Lagos, overthrew King Kosoko, and incorporated the region into the "programme for developing the world through the duality of free trade and the civilizing mission" promoted by Great Britain.[139] In 1852, Akitoye was reinstated and compelled to sign a treaty that abolished the slave trade, guaranteed free commerce, and facilitated missionary activity.[140]

In the next decade, the consular period (1851–1861) emerged, establishing legitimate trade as the core of a new economic system. The focus on exporting goods such as palm oil, palm kernel, rubber, and timber increased Lagos's trade volume and worth. Importantly, local producers and traders had already started trading products in the 1840s and 1850s, even before the complete abolition of the slave trade and the British Cession in 1861.[141] However, as Hopkins notes, the abolition of the slave trade did not automatically transform local commercial structures; this required the creation of institutions capable of sustainably reorienting regional economic dynamics. In practice, implementing legitimate commerce was costly and

[138] Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Demography of the Bight of Biafra Slave Trade, Ca. 1650–1850," in *Igbo in the Atlantic World: African Origins and Diasporic Destinations*, ed. Toyin Falola and Raphael Chijioke Njoku (Indiana University Press, 2016), 148.
[139] A.G. Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies: African Merchants in Lagos, 1851–1931* (Princeton University Press, 2024), 3. *The destruction of Lagos* (James Ridgway, Picadilly, 1852).
[140] Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies*, 440.
[141] Ayodeji Olukoju, "Lagos in the 19th Century," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, African History,* (2019), 14.

operationally complex. Moreover, political and commercial tensions that, by 1859, reconfigured trade routes further eroded British capacity to exert influence in the region.[142]

Lagos was also a place that attracted people to settle.[143] For instance, conflicts among the Yoruba kingdoms caused many refugees to settle there, including survivors from the Ijaye siege between 1860 and 1862. Additionally, the abolition of slavery and the establishment of the Lagos Colony attracted fugitive slaves from nearby regions. Christian missionary activities in the hinterland indirectly brought many refugees, such as Egba Christians fleeing Abeokuta to Lagos in 1867. But also, by the end of the century, Muslims outnumbered Christians in Lagos. In 1862, about 2,000 Muslims lived there, but their number grew to roughly a third of the estimated 42,000 Lagosians in 1881. This growth of Islam, however, contributed to community tensions.[144]

In 1851, CMS missionary work began in Lagos, which became the operational base in the Bight of Benin.[145] Initially, there was no infrastructure for Christian instruction, so preaching took place outdoors, and the first school began with twelve children. With the construction of the first church, Sunday School classes were moved into that building. As more churches were erected, Sunday services for adults were established and weekday schools for children were created, following the model used in Freetown, Sierra Leone.[146]

After Europeans were expelled from Abeokuta in 1867, Lagos became a major hub for education in Yorubaland. The city started secondary education in 1859 with the founding of the Church Missionary Society Grammar School. Prior to this, children from the African elite often went to England for higher studies, sometimes attending finishing schools for short periods. The

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[142] Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies*, 67, 408–414.
[143] CO 879 15, African n.192. Information respecting the settlement of Lagos, 1879. African no. 178. Information respecting the settlement of Lagos, 1879. African no. 179. Lagos, 1879.
[144] Olukoju, "Lagos in the 19th Century," 5, 8. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.281
[145] FO 881 4141, Correspondence relative to the Dispute between Consul Campbell and the Agents of the Church Missionary Society at Lagos, 1855, exposed the difficulties and disputes for the land.
[146] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 12.

colonial government provided limited financial support to Christian missions and did not fully fulfill its social responsibilities. Consequently, the quality of secondary education in Lagos remained relatively low due to inadequate funding.[147] Within the developed infrastructure, six churches were built. This effort involved the relocation of nine African clergymen and led to the conversion of 5,600 local congregants. The Society covered the costs of the Training Institution, the Grammar School, and the Female Institution. Additional stations were also established in nearby towns, including Ebute Meta, Badagry, Leke, and Ode Ondo.[148]

Lagos underwent significant changes in the second period due to a mix of local and external political, economic, and social factors. By the 1880s, it had become the leading port and commercial hub along West Africa's coast. By the 1890s, improved road and railway networks linked the port to a growing, densely populated agricultural interior, which included an expanding protectorate.[149]

d. **The education system and the evangelization process.**

At the beginning of the Yoruba Mission, the wives of the missionaries, Mrs. Townsend, Mrs. Gollmer, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Crowther, supported the education of the girls and helped prepare them for their roles as Christian women and mothers. "Sewing and samplers, bookmarks, letters, and copy books, come over to give pleasure to the kind friends in this Country, those who find the means for their education.[150]

The Lagos Grammar School was founded in 1859,[151] despite opposition from Henry Venn, secretary of the CMS in London. Venn favoured a model different from that of the Sierra

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[147] Olukoju, "Lagos in the 19th Century," 7.
[148] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 12.
[149] Olukoju, "Lagos in the 19th Century," 16.
[150] M.A.S. Barber, *Oshielle: or, Village life in the Yoruba country; from the journals and letters of a catechist there, describing the rise of a Christian church in an African village* (James Nisbet and co., 1857), *xxii.*
[151] J. F. Ade Ajayi, "The Development of Secondary Grammar School Education in Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 2, no. 4 (1963), 523.

Leone schools, one that combined technical and academic training to achieve institutional self-sufficiency, inspired by the system of the Basel missionaries on the Gold Coast. For example, "One was established at Abeokuta in 1851. It collected and cleaned cotton for export, taught brickmaking, carpentry, and printing. There was another one established at Onitsha in 1861 to serve the Niger Mission…"[152]

Ultimately, the Grammar School followed the Freetown curriculum and prospered, unlike other initiatives that eventually closed. Reverend T. B. Macaulay donated the premises of the Cotton House, but it was James Davies, husband of Sarah Bonetta, who financed and purchased the equipment and materials for the school, which became one of the most renowned in West Africa. In 1867, he later contributed to its expansion. Davies, a merchant and benefactor of the Anglican Church, also collaborated in the construction of another important Lagos institution, St. Paul's Breadfruit.[153]

In 1862, Lagos became a British colony, a development that entailed changes in urban infrastructure and the organization of streets, houses, and neighbourhoods. Regarding instruction in day schools, local individuals trained by missionaries in teacher-training institutions were incorporated as teachers. Colonial status functioned as a guarantee of political and legal stability, including the defense of territory and merchants, which enabled greater investment and the integration of Lagos into imperial trade networks.[154] From the 1870s, the creation of primary and secondary schools led to the emergence of an African elite comprising medical doctors, lawyers, teachers, and journalists. Newspapers played a role in fostering the earliest expressions of anti-colonial nationalism, particularly cultural nationalism.[155]

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[152] Ajayi, "The Development of Secondary," 519–520.
[153] Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies*, 141.
[154] Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies,* 431.
[155] Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies*. Olukoju, "Lagos in the 19th Century."

Within the framework of so-called civilizing efforts aimed at regulating and instructing the urban population, infrastructure was built specifically for women's education. The purpose was for them, in turn, to accompany or educate the region's "future citizens." For example, Mrs. Lamb's account, published in the *Coral Magazine* in 1867, reports on the changes she made to women's education to make the system more inclusive and efficient. Since she modified the Sunday Schools, "Instead of having men, women, and children all in one school, I have the women and girls under my superintendence in the little chapel. I take the first class of girls."[156] After school, they have to attend church. She also organized a "Ladies' Working Association" to work on a missionary basket, so "The ladies come to me once a fortnight, and either Mr. D. Crowther or I read while they work."[157] The profits from the basket were meant for the new church building fund. On Tuesdays, Mr. Lamb had a class for older girls and young women; they worked for an hour, then had a Bible lesson. Her plan also included meeting with the mothers of the children.

So, as we can see, work and education went hand in hand. But also, she was thinking in ways on how the women could be more "useful" for the missions, by "I am going now to begin to make the big girls useful if possible, and, instead of allowing them to leave school and trade about the town, to employ them in needlework of all kinds, and pay them so much a week. I shall get orders for work from friends, and so supply them."[158] She established an infant school, in which she employed the catechist's daughter, Christiana Wright, after training her for three hours daily for a month as an infant schoolteacher, with a salary of £12 a year. In this school, Mrs. Lamb used "…my two native girls, Aiyrna and Awa, who act as under

[156] *Coral Missionary Magazine*, April 1, 1867, 52.
[157] *Coral Missionary Magazine*, April 1, 1867, 52.
[158] *Coral Missionary Magazine*, April 1, 1867, 53.

teachers."[159] This account is not only meant to inform about the progress of her work in Lagos, but also to request help from either the infant school or the working classes, like "…large texts to hang round the room, and we want a counting frame or two, and slates and pencils, and little primers, and cards of letters."[160]

1. Lagos Female Training Institution

As Mrs. Lamb wished, a few years after her arrival in Lagos and her publication in the Coral Magazine, funding was obtained to establish a Female Institution, as in Freetown. Thanks to the efforts of Anna Hinderer and Mrs. Abigail Macaulay (daughter of Bishop Ajayi Crowther and wife of Reverend T. A. B. Macaulay), a school for older girls was established. The goal was to educate these young women so they could become future mothers and wives of already educated Africans. To have a British-style education, families were required to pay a fee of one quarter of a guinea. The classes started on 1 May 1869. The school was first managed by Annie Roper and her husband, but due to illness, they returned to England. "Then the superintendence of the school was most kindly undertaken by the wife of a native gentleman who had been educated in England."[161] This was Sarah Bonetta Forbes, but she was unable to continue in this role after one year because of her responsibilities as a mother. Subsequently, the institution was managed by Reverend Townsend and his wife, and later by Reverend Mann and his wife in 1872.[162]

Mann's report about the Female Institution in 1872, "On the 23 of January we took charge of the previous Institution School and on the 2 of March we remove from the narrow

[159] *Coral Missionary Magazine*, April 1, 1867, 52.
[160] *Coral Missionary Magazine*, April 1, 1867, 52.
[161] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. II, 1875, 120.
[162] CA2O66 Rev. Adolphus Christian Mann, 48–99 Reports on the Female Institute, including statistics and furniture for the new Institute. Rev. Mann proposed creating the Ladies Committee with Mrs. Jos Crowther, Mrs. Foroylhe, and Mrs. Davies as members.

room of the old Mission house to the new premises, at the same time we have a slight increase of pupils."[163] According to a 1875 report in *The Gleaner*, based on Annie Roper's account, a new building was built to meet high demand, admitting students from Abeokuta, Ibadan, Badagry, and nearby regions. Students coming from outside had the option to live on-site, which meant they would need to sew and iron their own clothes, do their own laundry, and take care of their rooms. The educational program aimed to shape colonial subjects with an "English mentality and conduct," thus reinforcing imperial control. The girls received what was called "a useful and good education, thoroughly English,"[164] which included drawing, singing, reading, writing in English, sewing, and cooking. They also learned teaching techniques and gained practical experience by working with young children from nearby schools. By 1875, the institution had 49 students, 16 of whom had come from outside Lagos.[165] For example, two girls from Porto Novo.[166]

Mrs. Roper was absent from the Institute for some time, and when she returned from London, she was authorized to teach the girls, and she developed practical training exercises.[167] During these sessions, each young woman was assigned to teach a class at a school while the others observed. Subsequently, they offered feedback to the student responsible for the lesson, fostering collective improvement in teaching. These young women were expected to impart British education to their future children or pupils in mission schools and to become the wives of locally educated African men or teachers. This emphasis effectively marginalized maternal

[163] CA2O66 Rev. Adolphus Christian Mann, 93.
[164] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. II, 1875, 119–120. See Appendix F, G and H.
[165] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. II, 1875, 120.
[166] CA2O66 Rev. Adolphus Christian Mann, 93
[167] CA2O81 Rev. Edward Roper, 16, 29–31.

languages and indigenous knowledge, placing English as the primary pathway to "legitimate knowledge" and silencing alternative perspectives and worldviews.

Throughout the nineteenth century, conversion strategies varied according to the location of the missions. This was due in part to political and economic instability resulting from warfare and the transition from illicit to so-called "legitimate" commerce. In their efforts to liberate souls from sin and slavery through conversion to Christianity, missionaries were therefore compelled to reconsider their rules. For example, when local chiefs refused to free their slaves, missionaries accepted enslaved individuals into their services. In this way, the complexity of the period required missionaries to adopt different and flexible responses.

Despite the instability under which these missions operated, it is noteworthy that between 1840 and 1875 there was substantial growth in conversion to Christianity and that, driven by the expansion of educational centers, a growing number of African missionaries were trained across the three West African missions. By 1876, the Sierra Leone Mission comprised four European missionaries, five African clergy, and 17 African agents. In terms of conversion, there were 3,930 African Christians and 1,165 communicants. Of these, seventeen were African pastors and chaplains, and 10,000 new Christians were transferred to the local church. The mission in Yoruba land had only seven European missionaries and a predominantly African staff consisting of thirteen clergy members and fifty-eight agents, with a social base of 4,980 Christians and 1,800 African communicants. Meanwhile, the most recent mission, the Niger Mission, was already entirely African, composed of twelve missionaries, fifteen agents, 590 Christians, and 173 communicants.[168] If we compare these statistics with those shown in the next table from 1878 for the Yoruba and Niger Mission, the numbers continue to grow: more African (native)

[168] "Chronological table: showing the principal events connected with the Society's Missions to West and East Africa," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. III, 1876, 96.

Christians and more communicants. This table also includes information on the baptisms of adults and children, as well as details on the schools and scholars. The Yoruba Mission has more scholars than Sierra Leone, which started earlier than the Niger, which was growing but with difficulties, as we will address.

Table 3.1. Extracts from the Statistics of the C.M.S. Missions, 1878[169]

	European Clergy	African Clergy	European Lay Agents	African Lay Agents	African Christians	Communicants	Adults (Baptisms in 1877)	Children (Baptisms in 1877)	Schools	Scholars
Sierra Leone	6	3	4	16	2143	842	5	81	4	817
Yoruba	**5**	**13**	**1**	**67**	**5845**	**2024**	**202**	**207**	**29**	**1488**
Niger	-	10	1	14	901	201	49	48	7	235

* The 'European Clergy' include those at home on sick leave, &c. The figures for Sierra Leone exclude the independent Native Church, which has 13 clergy, 12,400 Christians, and 3,400 scholars. Use of African instead of *Native*.

Regarding the statistics from the Yoruba Mission in the next table, we can see that after 1850, the number of Agents and communicants continues to grow in the reported years, especially between 1865 and 1878, when the number of converts increases. From 1850 to 1878, the number of students passed from 6 to 29 and the number of scholars increased from 418 to 1488. The number of European missionaries serving the Yoruba Mission was declining by 1878; the peak was reached by 1865 and 1873, even though it was a complicated period for European missionaries in the region due to the inter-war period discussed earlier in this chapter.

[169] The original table from where I extracted the statistics for the West African missions, it is a Condensed table from the Annual Report publish in *The Church Missionary Gleaner* of 1878, 96.

Table 3.2. Statistics Yoruba Mission from 1845 to 1878

Statistics	1845	1850	1855	1860	1865	1873	1878
Europeans Missionaries	2	5	7	6	10	10	4
European Lay Agents				6	2	1	1
African Clergy	**1**	**1**	**3**	**5**	**5**	**9**	**13**
African Agents	**3**	**10**	**28**	**46**	**45**	**44**	**67**
African Christians					**2200**	**4400**	**5845**
Communicants		122	536	916	1125	1517	2024
Schools		6	13	17	14	24	29
Scholars		418	775	555	868	1324	1488

Source: MP CO 700 Lagos 3. Church Missionary Atlas 1878, 36. (Use of African instead of *Native*)

According to Oroge, in a region where most of the chiefs disapproved of Christian education, the missionaries realized that their most effective approach to gaining converts and enrolling children was to redeem slaves or to take in the children of distressed parents who desperately needed money. Consequently, traditional practices such as domestic slavery and *iwofa*[170] became important tools for the purpose of evangelism.[171]

By promoting a fund in the *Coral Missionary Magazine*, Miss M.A.S. Barber of Brighton appealed to Christian friends in England and raised some funds. In this way, "…with this money, known as the Coral Fund, Anglican missionaries, especially in Abeokuta, Lagos, Otta and Oshielle, were able to effect the redemption of many slaves,

[170] "Pawning oneself or one's children, relatives and slaves evidently arose from unequal distribution of wealth, and the coming of the Atlantic trade. (…) The institution appears to have existed only on a very small scale and only in a few places in the Yoruba country in the period before the nineteenth century." Based on Oroge, the introduction in Lagos was after 1865 and in Ijebu after 1892. Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 75–76.
[171] Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 87.

children as well as adults, and to receive many children in pawn for money loaned to their parents."[172] Some missionaries benefited from the Coral Fund; for example, in 1860, Townsend cared for 26 Coral Fund children of various ages in his boarding house. Dr. Harrison, the Anglican Medical Officer, and his wife, who conducted sewing and embroidery classes, had fourteen Coral Fund girls aged between 12 and 20 in 1863. A year later, in Abeokuta, 72 Coral Fund children were recorded, besides some at Lagos, Otta, and 6 at Oshiele.[173]

By the 1870s, for example, Reverend William Moore seems to have been the only Anglican missionary operating the Coral Fund in the Yoruba region. The children under the Coral Fund's care numbered just fifteen in 1880. Eleven of them were *iwofa*, while the other four were children ransomed from domestic slavery. Furthermore, he possessed four additional pawns that he personally acquired. The Coral Fund was not the sole method the Anglican mission used to acquire pawns, nor was it the only mission involved in acquiring pawns. Also, the Ijaye Relief Refund in 1861, coordinated by the C.M.S. in Abeokuta, allowed Rev. Adolphus Mann to evacuate 33 pawns from Ijaye.[174]

On many occasions, individual Anglican missionaries used their money to fund the redemption of slaves and the acquisition of pawns. The Coral Fund did not operate in Ibadan; instead, Hinderer, apart from sporadic donations from Christian friends in England, often had to redeem slaves and acquire pawns at his own expense, sometimes borrowing money and going without food. Similar private acquisitions of pawns were practiced by African missionaries and

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[172] Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 87.
[173] Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey of the Yoruba Institution of Indenture." African Economic History, no. 14 (1985), 88. Harrison to Venn, 28 Sept. 1863, Jane Harrison to Venn, 30 December 1863, C.M.S. CA2 045. Minutes of Conference held at Lagos, March 1880, C.M.S. G AZl 4 Enc. 125.
M.A.S. Barber, *Oshielle: or, Village life in the Yoruba country; from the journals and letters of a catechist there, describing the rise of a Christian church in an African village* (James Nisbet and co., 1857).
[174] E. Adeniyi Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 88. C A 2 0 66 Rev. Adolphus Christian Mann.

Anglican missionary agents in Ibadan and its outstations.[175] The next table breaks down by sex the pawns acquired in 1879 at personal expense and for personal use by missionaries and agents in the Ibadan area, found by Oroge.

Table 3.3. Missionaries and agents in Ibadan with pawns by sex in 1879

Place/Missionary	Pawns	Boys	Girls
Ibadan			
Rev. D. Olubi	4	3	1
Mr. W.S. Allen	1	1	-
Mr. Samuel Johnson	3	2	1
Mr. J. Okusehinde	2	1	1
Mr. F.L. Akiele	3	2	1
Mr. R.S. Oyebode	1	1	-
Oyo			
Mr. T. Williams	4	3	1
Ogbomosho			
Mr. D. Osi	4	4	-
Ilesha			
Mr. G. Vincent	1	1	1
Total:	24	18	6

Source: Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey of the Yoruba Institution of Indenture," *African Economic History*, no. 14 (1985), 89.

The table shows that male pawns outnumber female pawns and that Missionaries used the pawns privately for domestic labour, not only for evangelistic purposes. We can also consider that insufficient funds were a major obstacle to the missionaries' efforts to obtain pawns and free slaves.

Ayandele, reviewing the contributions of slaves and pawns during the pre-colonial era to missionary efforts, argues that "without slaves and pawns no schools or churches could be erected in Yorubaland."[176] Oroge also contends that the Anglican mission was one of the systems that benefited from pawnship, and it was the first to launch a crusade against pawns since 1877. In 1876, James Johnson became the Superintendent of all CMS stations in the Yoruba Mission,

[175] E. Adeniyi Oroge, "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 88. Minutes of Conference held at Lagos, March 1880, C.M.S. G AZl 4 Enc. 125.
[176] Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, 333.

based in Abeokuta. According to Johnson, slaveholding was incompatible with his brand of Christianity, and he "decided in favour of a 'pure' church in which members would hold neither slaves nor pawns."[177] Between March and May 1877, Johnson began his campaign against slavery in Ibadan, including slave-buying, slave-catching, and slave-holding. The earlier table also indicates that, by 1879, there were still nine missionaries with a total of 24 pawns.

At the CMS Conference in Lagos in 1880, which was presided over by Crowther and had Faulkner as the secretary, Johnson's crusade was not supported. Rev. D. Williams of Ake, supported by a number of other Africans drawn from both the clergy and the laity, maintained the thesis that an *iwofa* was not a slave. Also, Rev. D. Olubi stated that pawns are not slaves because "In the case of grown-up pawns, even with heathen, they have a certain amount of labour to perform daily, and also stated times of rest, in order to enable them to pay off the debt."[178]

Bishop Crowther made reference in his intervention about the creditor-master obligations with the Pawnee: "The pawn is never considered by the Pawnee as his slave, nor can he be sold away by him as such; should anyone sell a pawn, the relatives will manage to return the loan, and the person pawned will then be demanded with heavy damages. In case of a pawn being seriously ill, he is removed to the house of his family to avoid complications in case of his death. But an unpaid loan or a pawn may be claimed by the relatives of the pawn after many generations."[179]

After the conference, the CMS agents in the Yoruba Mission informed their London Secretariat that anti-slavery campaigns, such as those by James Johnson and preaching against

[177] Oroge "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 90.
[178] Oroge "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 91. Minutes of Conference held at Lagos, March 1880, C.M.S. G/AZ1/4 Enc. 125.
[179] Oroge "Iwofa: An Historical Survey," 92. Minutes of Conference held at Lagos, March 1880, C.M.S. G/AZ1/4 Enc. 125.

domestic slavery, could lead to a "wholesale slaughter of Native Christians, the plundering and expulsion of our beloved white missionaries, and a complete eradication of Christianity."[180]

This chapter provides a broader context for the nineteenth century and the political changes in the Bight of Benin and its interior. It examines the fall of Oyo, the rise of military towns such as Ibadan, the growth of Abeokuta, and the expansion of Ilorin, developments that collectively shaped a landscape of conflict, displacement, and instability. These events were central rather than incidental to the period, as warfare produced systems of capture and displacement that disproportionately affected women and children. The trade routes linking inland towns such as Awaye and Efon to coastal cities like Lagos, and further to Atlantic ports such as Freetown, created a regional circulation network in which women's lives were deeply embedded. Understanding women's experiences in this period, therefore, requires analyzing a politically and economically dynamic environment shaped by local conflicts and broader Atlantic developments.

[180] C.M.S. Agents to Secretaries 14 June 1889, C.M.S. G3 A2 5.

CHAPTER 4. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA FROM THE CMS MISSIONS

The archives of the Church Missionary Society constitute a documentary source of immense historical value, preserving extensive correspondence, reports, diaries, and records produced by missionaries, administrators, and community members. A selection of these documents was published in CMS newspapers, which provide further insight into lived experiences and enable the study of political, cultural, and religious interactions across different parts of the British world, including the Bight of Benin and Sierra Leone. Taken together, this corpus of sources allows for the reconstruction of a global network of connections spanning multiple spaces, offering a transnational perspective not only on missionary expansion but also on local reconfigurations and transformations.

The life stories of women in the missions are diverse and historically significant. Families were reunited after decades apart, and some women joined the missions to escape slavery. Adult women found opportunities to become catechists, assist with mission work, and engage with educational institutions. Over time, they took on roles as schoolmistresses, assuming responsibility not only for girls' education but also for the administration of schools more broadly. Younger girls accessed education through village schools, training schools, and female institutes, where curricula combined academic subjects, including mathematics, literature, and English, with domestic training. By the end of the nineteenth century, a growing number of African women had assumed positions as schoolteachers, catechists, schoolmistresses, and missionaries, reflecting a gradual but significant shift toward greater African women's participation across mission stations.

This chapter identifies and analyses the life stories of women of Yoruba origin across three missions: Sierra Leone, Yoruba, and Niger. Biographical data have been recovered

primarily from CMS newspapers and records, including the CMS *Gleaner* (1840–1890), searched using the terms women, woman, female, girl, mother, daughter, wife, and sister. Additional sources consulted include the Proceedings books, the Missionary Papers, the *Intelligencer*, and personal correspondence and journal extracts from missionaries. From these sources, a database was constructed to record, where possible, each woman's name, age, place of origin, status, year of observation, role in the mission, movements, and experiences. The analysis is guided by three central questions: How did these women arrive at and join the missions? What were their origins? And in what ways did, or did not, their presence shape their communities?

The chapter is organized into four sections: escaping slavery and joining the CMS missions; the evolving role of women in the missions over time; the impact of women's conversion on both the CMS and local society, including experiences of persecution; and, finally, a series of ten case studies, drawn from the broader patterns identified in earlier sections, that offer extended biographical accounts of individual women whose documented experiences are sufficiently rich to sustain detailed analysis.

A. Escaping slavery and joining the CMS missions

Women's experiences of slavery in the nineteenth-century Yoruba region and the Bight of Benin were marked by repeated cycles of capture, circulation, fragmentation, and conditional recovery. These patterns were part of a regional system connecting inland war zones to coastal and missionary centres such as Lagos and Freetown. Throughout this analysis, slavery is understood not as a fixed state but as a multi-stage process that shaped women's lives from childhood to adulthood, closely linked to kinship, mobility, and religious transformation.

However, the sources through which these experiences are recovered impose significant interpretive limits. The accounts preserved in CMS archives and newspapers were produced by

missionaries embedded within imperial structures, writing for metropolitan audiences in Britain with specific institutional and evangelical purposes. These narratives were crafted to document spiritual transformation, justify missionary enterprise, and demonstrate the civilizing benefits of conversion, not to record women's lives on their own terms. As a result, women appear in these sources largely at moments that served the missionaries' narrative purposes: arrival at a mission station, baptism, marriage, or death. What lies beyond these moments, the texture of daily life, women's own interpretations of their experiences, their relationships, and their silences, remains largely inaccessible. Reading these sources thus requires sustained attention to what is said, how it is said, and, crucially, what is left unsaid or rendered invisible by the constraints of the archive itself.

This section moves through several interconnected contexts. It begins with women residing in Freetown, whose cases illustrate the experiences of those from the Bight of Benin who were enslaved, subsequently arrived in Sierra Leone as "Liberated Africans," and either reunited with family members or returned to the Bight of Benin. The focus then shifts to women who participated in the Yoruba Mission, followed by those in the Niger Mission. Across all three missions, a recurring theme is the reunion of family members separated by enslavement, stories that attracted particular attention in CMS newspapers, especially accounts of missionaries reuniting with their mothers. Together, these narratives document diverse experiences of women from various communities between the 1840s and 1890s, highlighting their movements, agency, and engagement in both missionary and broader societal activities.

The violence underpinning these experiences was neither distant nor residual. As James Gerber documented in 1859, "many of the chiefs and people in Abeokuta persevere in their old

ways."[1] The wars associated with slave capture persisted well into the mid-nineteenth century, noting that individuals were seized and sold into slavery even when they had not participated in kidnapping or slave-trading. His account offers a particularly stark depiction of the treatment of women, who were restrained with brass rings fastened around their necks and linked together in chains in groups of forty or fifty. Gerber emphasized that, severe as their suffering was on land, it was still considered less devastating than the horrors of the transatlantic slave ship, a reminder that the violence of slavery extended far beyond the moment of capture.[2]

At the initial stage of conflict, warfare emerges as one of the primary causes of enslavement. In 1854, the destruction of towns such as Efon and Awaye led to widespread displacement, in which "the women and children, after wandering about in despair and misery, were taken prisoners, and sold for slaves."[3] The case of Ogunyomi illustrates this pattern clearly: after war broke out, her father disappeared, her town was destroyed, and she and her mother fled, only to be violently separated and sold. A formerly enslaved Christian man, unable to rescue her, informed Mr. and Mrs. Hinderer, who paid her ransom and brought her to the mission house.[4] Similarly, the daughter of Awaye's scripture-reader was captured by Ibadan forces and nearly sold before being rescued,[5] and another woman from Awaye was captured during the town's destruction, sold, and later redeemed by Townsend in Abeokuta.[6] These cases reveal a consistent pattern in which military conflict generated a supply of enslaved women and children, setting off trajectories of forced movement across the region.

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[1] "The sufferings and deliverance of James Gerber, a twice liberated African," *The Church Missionary Gleaner* 1859, 21.
[2] "The sufferings and deliverance of James Gerber," 22.
[3] Anna Hinderer, S*eventeen Years in the Yoruba Country. Memorials of Anna Hinderer, wife of the Rev. David Hinderer,* C. M. S. Missionary in Western Africa. ed. C.A. and D. Hone, with an Introduction by Richard B. Hone, M.A. Piccadilly (The religious Track Society, 1872), 143.
[4] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 143–144.
[5] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 268–69.
[6] CMS. CA2 085(b), Townsend to Venn, Annual Letter, 4 February 1864.

This broader context of persistent violence is further illustrated in missionary accounts of specific conflicts, such as the destruction of Aibo on 7 November 1857, as reported by Rev. T. King in the *Gleaner*. According to this account, the Aibo people had previously captured several inhabitants of Abeokuta and delivered them to the king of Dahomey, prompting a retaliatory attack by Abeokuta chiefs. The siege, which lasted nearly five months, had devastating consequences for non-combatants. As King observed, "the innocent farmers and the females, as is always the case, are the worst sufferers,"[7] with many perishing from hunger before the town fell, as men refused to surrender. Attempts by women to flee were repeatedly frustrated through the invocation of Oro, highlighting how both warfare and ritual authority constrained female mobility and survival.

The account also records extreme instances of violence within this context of siege and desperation. One man killed his three children with poisoned arrows before attempting to take his own life; his wife was forced to witness the killing of their children, unable to intervene and anticipating her own death. Although she was later taken to Abeokuta, the emotional consequences of these events remained profound. When her husband proposed redeeming her after securing his own freedom, she rejected the offer, expressing her irreparable loss: "What pleasure can my redemption impart to me… what are my prospects but dark and hopeless melancholy?"[8] The account foregrounds the emotional and gendered dimensions of wartime suffering in ways that are strategic within missionary sources: "the poor mother had been obliged to witness the ruthless destruction of her children in pensive grief,"[9] though it is worth noting

[7] "African wars," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1858, 16.
[8] "African wars," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1858, 16.
[9] "African wars," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1858, 16.

that even this exceptional moment of visibility was recorded and framed by a missionary narrator with his own interpretive purposes.

After capture, women's lives were marked by circulation across multiple regimes of control, including resale, domestic servitude, and forced relocation. Ohlomo's trajectory is emblematic: deceived by the promise of reunion with her mother, she was sold and "subsequently passed through various hands" before arriving in Lagos.[10] Ogunyomi likewise moved from capture to market sale in Ibadan, facing the imminent threat of being transported to the coast and shipped away.[11] Even where women remained in one region, their status was unstable: Mrs. Green, though married to a free Christian man, remained legally enslaved and had to be redeemed to prevent the re-enslavement of herself and her children,[12] while Atipui's mother was simultaneously a slave and a wife, illustrating how slavery could be embedded within domestic and marital structures.[13] These cases underscore that enslavement was not a singular condition but a shifting status shaped by ownership, location, and social relations.

Within this wider landscape of conflict and captivity, individual life histories further illuminate the complex trajectories that could emerge from enslavement, including involvement in human sacrifice or enslavement as a form of payment or punishment. Two cases recorded by Crowther are particularly illustrative. The first, during the Niger expedition of 1857, concerned

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[10] "One day a person came to her native village in the Yoruba country and asked her if she knew anything of her mother. She replied, she did not. He said if she would accompany him to Abbeokuta he would take her to her mother. She agreed to do so; but instead, if being taken to Abbeokuta, she was carried to the Jaboo country and sold as a slave. She subsequently passed through various hands, but at last became the property of Badda, one of King Docemo's slaves, and the husband of Madame Tinnaboo." AFRICA (Consular) - Bight of Benin. no. 55, 42. Letter from Consul Brand to Lord J. Russell. (Received February 13, 1860), no. 18, Lagos, December 31, 1859. See Appendix A.

[11] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 143–144.

[12] Wesleyan Missionary Notices, 1861, 210; WMN, 1862, 181; WMN, 1863, 13.

[13] "The mother is living in the town; the man who had her as a slave, had made her his wife, and is very kind to her. She will be able to come and see her little boy whenever she likes. When she heard he would never be a slave again, she did not know what to do with herself for joy," 204. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 202–204.

"…a poor harmless woman, a slave, who was on the point of being killed as a sacrifice, in honour of a man who had died six months before. Happily, they succeeded in rescuing her."[14] The second, at Brass River Station in 1872, near the mouth of the Niger, involved the daughter of Chief Spiff, King Ockiya's most trusted adviser. Her father was plotted against and nearly killed because he refused to worship local deities. However, he managed to escape to the Mission premises, where he remained. Afterward, he was left unmolested, but "they had compelled him to pay a heavy fine of three puncheons of palm oil, and his younger daughter was forcibly taken away from him as a slave."[15] Together, these cases demonstrate the diverse and often extreme circumstances through which women entered conditions of enslavement.

A central and recurring feature across these stories is family fragmentation, particularly between mothers and children. The separation of Ogunyomi from her mother during capture and their eventual reunion in Ibadan highlight both the violence of rupture and the persistence of kinship ties. The dramatic moment of their reunion, recorded by Anna Hinderer, captures the emotional intensity that missionary sources only occasionally preserved: "She cried out, 'Ogunyomi!' Ogunyomi turned round, stared for a long time at the woman, and then, with the cry 'My mother, my mother!' threw herself into her arms."[16] Similar dynamics appear in the case of Atipui's mother, who lost all four of her children in war and later recognized her young son by facial marks while visiting the mission house, "She called him by a certain name, but the little boy did not know it…"[17] After a while, the boy recalled his mother, and she visited him. She lived in the town but was enslaved and married to her master. A different outcome occurred with

[14] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 177, 1860, 3.
[15] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 230, 1873, 4.
[16] Hinderer noted in her journal for May 6, "Ogunyomi finds her mother." The story about the mother and the daughter was written in German for children and then published in the book. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 146. See appendix C.
[17] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 202.

Arubo, whose mother's sale left the child abandoned and near death in the streets of Ibadan before being rescued by the Hinderers.[18]

The most expansive version of this pattern appears in the case of Ohlomo, whose mother had been enslaved, transported across the Atlantic, and liberated in Sierra Leone, while her daughter remained in the interior of the Bight of Benin. Their eventual reunion, coordinated through missionary and consular intervention, was reported as "Ohlomo's mother is expected to arrive here from Sierra Leone by next packet, and thus, through British interposition, mother and daughter will meet, both as free persons, after a separation of many years."[19] This case illustrates how the disruption of reproductive and affective bonds by slavery could only be partially remedied through contingent and institutionally mediated acts of recovery.[20]

The transition from enslavement to freedom was consistently mediated through redemption, an economic and negotiated act rather than an automatic consequence of abolition. In Lagos, Ohlomo's freedom was officially recognized after the payment of ten bags of cowries and the granting of a certificate of freedom.[21] Moneyakpa (Reki) was redeemed through funds collected by her mother and local intermediaries, "The Balogun [of Ilorin] agreed to this, named twelve bags of cowries and sent two messengers to receive them. The cowries were kindly provided by Mr. James Markson Turner, a settler from Sierra Leone, formerly himself a slave,

[18] "On enquiring they found that he was the child of a slave; the mother was sold many months ago, far away; the master of the house where the child was is gone to war, and so what was everybody's charge became nobody's (…) so my husband hired a woman to carry him on her back, and bring him to me; and here he is, a pretty-looking little child, but with a countenance so full of sorrow." Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 104–105.
[19] AFRICA (Consular) - Bight of Benin. no. 55, 42. Letter from Consul Brand to Lord J. Russell. (Received February 13, 1860), no. 18, Lagos, December 31, 1859.
[20] Since her language was unknown, it was difficult to communicate with her. Townsend wrote "We felt assured that if the child were delivered back to her she would be more effectually deprived of it again, therefore there remained no means of relieving her deep distress but that of redeeming her and restoring her child to her. This we did." Oroge, CMS CA2 085(b), Jour. of H. Townsend [for 1858] and CA2/085(a), Townsend to Venn, 18 October 1858.
[21] AFRICA (Consular) - Bight of Benin. no. 55, 42. Letter from Consul Brand to Lord J. Russell. - (Received February 13, 1860), no. 18, Lagos, December 31, 1859.

and delivered over the Balogun's messengers, in my presence, on the 28th ultimo."[22] In missionary settings, redemption was equally contingent: Ogunyomi was bought and brought to the mission; her mother Lucy Fagbeade was redeemed when near death so that her daughter could care for her;[23] and the Awaye girl was rescued through the diversion of limited resources.[24] These examples demonstrate that freedom depended on financial means, social networks, and institutional mediation, resulting in profoundly uneven outcomes.

After redemption, women often entered missionary or quasi-domestic environments where their lives were partially reconstituted and reshaped through education, Christianization, and new forms of labour. Ogunyomi learned literacy, sewing, and religious practice within the mission household, finding that "…singing was a pleasure to her, and she quickly learned simple prayers and easy texts."[25] A formerly enslaved girl trained by Townsend's wife and later by the Female Institution in Sierra Leone was subsequently employed as an assistant at a boarding school,[26] while Lucy Fagbeade, after recovering her health, became a cook for the mission children.[27] Yet this process of incorporation was neither uniform nor total. Samuel's mother, though redeemed, refused conversion and remained socially and religiously distant from the mission community,[28] a reminder that missionary spaces functioned simultaneously as sites of protection, discipline, and cultural transformation, rather than uncomplicated zones of freedom.

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[22] AFRICA (Consular) - Bight of Benin. no. 55, 42. Letter from Consul Brand to Lord J. Russell (Received February 13, 1860), no. 18, Lagos, December 31, 1859.
[23] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 293.
[24] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 268–69.
[25] Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 145.
[26] CMS. CA2/085(b), Townsend to Venn, Annual Letter, 31 January 1860.
[27] "For Ogunyomi's sake they paid the poor woman's ransom, and removed her to the mission-house. For ten months she was nursed and cared for by these new friends, and then, to the joy of all, especially of her own child, she recovered. When her health was sufficiently re-established, she was employed as cook for the children, and found much happiness in the altered circumstances of her life." Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 147. See Appendix C.
[28] "July 23rd [1867] Little Samuel is going on very nicely and goes to our second day-school. For a time, his mother was in the compound in which he resides, but he has been greatly grieved that she has left it to dwell among the heathen. He cried much, because he hoped she would hear the Word of God; but 'now,' he says, 'she throws

One case that exemplifies the intersections of violence, mobility, and conversion with particular clarity is that of Maria Yesomina.[29] Captured during the Dahomian assault on Abeokuta in 1864, she was enslaved and later redeemed by a Christian agent. She was subsequently incorporated into the Dahomian female military system before her eventual conversion and baptism in Abeokuta in January 1872, dying as a free woman in 1875. Her trajectory, moving between enslavement, militarization, and religious transformation, underscores the fluidity of status and identity within the nineteenth-century Bight of Benin, and illustrates the limits of any linear narrative of progress from captivity to Christian freedom.

Finally, these stories collectively reveal that freedom remained fragile and incomplete. Women continued to struggle with illness, social exclusion, and the threat of re-enslavement. The case of a leprous enslaved girl abandoned by her master and dying in a fire illustrates the extreme disposability of enslaved people,[30] while the woman in Ibadan, condemned to be sold "for powder" as punishment, demonstrates how slavery could function as a judicial instrument.[31] Even in seemingly stable situations, such as Lucy Fagbeade's later life, her story is framed as a continuum of suffering, redemption, and eventual death, a moral and spiritual reinterpretation of her experience that reflects the missionaries' own narrative purposes as much as it reflects the reality of her life.[32]

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salvation away from her.' Aug. 14th- His mother is now redeemed, and has every opportunity of coming to church, but she stoutly refuses and says her fathers' gods are quite enough for her." Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 302–303.

[29] "Epitome of Missionary News," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 36.

[30] "A leprous slave girl cast out by her master who died in a fire in 1857," CA2 085(a), Townsend to Venn, 28 Jan. 1857.

[31] "In 1869 at Ibadan, a woman who had caused a fire that razed about 200 compounds to the ground and was in addition found to be harbouring her son, who was wanted for man-stealing at Abeokuta, was with the son "condemned to be sold for powder." CMS. CA2 075, Olubi, Journal. Extracts for the Half Year ending Dec. 1869.

[32] "June 20th [1867]... In the midst of all this noise and confusion, these dark and evil doings, our dear Lucy Fagbeade, Ogunyomi's mother, fell asleep in Jesus. She was a very sincere woman, who extremely disliked much talking and noise about things in religion. (…) Eleven years ago we redeemed her from slavery, when she was apparently sick unto death, that her child might nurse her, and soothe her dying hours; and God has spared her eleven years and redeemed her soul by the precious blood of Christ, and has now taken he to dwell with Him for ever." Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, 292, 293.

Taken together, these sources reveal a cohesive regional system in which women's experiences were shaped by interconnected forces of war, enslavement, mobility, and institutional involvement, linking inland Yoruba communities to coastal hubs such as Lagos and to transatlantic centres such as Freetown. In all instances, slavery is best understood as a lifelong condition that shaped childhood, motherhood, labour, and belief. Redemption mattered, but it was conditional, negotiated, and often incomplete, and its limits were as much a product of the imperial archive that recorded it as of the historical realities it sought to document.

a. Accounts of missionaries finding or reconnecting with their families after enslavement

A related, though distinct, pattern can be observed in the experiences of African Christian agents captured during Dahomean incursions, particularly in the cases of William Doherty and John Baptist Dasalu, and in the consequences of their capture for their mothers and wives. In March 1863, during the capture of Ishagga, Doherty was taken to Abomey.[33] As reported in a letter from Rev. J. A. Maser to the CMS headquarters on 30 August, his liberation was received with considerable relief: "I rejoice with you on account of the liberation of William Doherty… we have heard also nothing more than the bare fact that the party arrived safely at Lagos."[34] Upon his release in 1866, Doherty reunited with his mother and two sisters at the mission station,

[33] William Doherty, African catechist that returned to Lagos in 1854. The CMS sent him from Abeokuta to establish a mission in Isagga. He was enslaved for the second time when the Dahomean forces took Isagga. For more about his history, 118. Richard Anderson, *African Narratives of Slavery and Abolition. Testimonies from the 19th century* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 117–122.

[34] "William Doherty, the native catechist of Ishagga," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 123–125. The CMS paid his ransom of £50 in cotton-gins and other presents to the King of Dahomey, and he returned to his family and mission work in Lagos, as stated in Bishop Crowther's Statement of the Expenditure of the West African Native Bishopric Fund. Niger mission: *Bishop Crowther's report of the overland journey from Lokoja to Bida, on the River Niger: and thence to Lagos, on the seacoast, from November 10th, 1871, to February 8th, 1872* (Church Missionary House, 1872), 35.

while his son, Samuel, had travelled to Whydah on behalf of the CMS in search of him and was instrumental in securing his liberation.[35]

Similarly, John Baptist Dasalu was captured during an earlier Dahomean campaign "when the King of Dahomey's troops, male and female, were repulsed from the walls of Abeokuta in 1851."[36] Initially presumed dead, he was later found to be alive, while his brother was among those killed. When Crowther arrived in Lagos from England, he learned that Dasalu remained a prisoner in Dahomey. According to Gollmer's January 1852 journal, his wife received news of him: "I have just heard from my husband," before relocating to Badagry to await his return. Subsequent efforts by Crowther and Townsend to secure his redemption further demonstrate the networks mobilized around such cases.[37]

Although these captures took place at different moments, Dasalu in 1851 and Doherty in 1863, and were reported retrospectively, they reveal a common pattern in which missionary agents, once freed, rejoined mission communities through acts of family reunification. However, these stories also highlight gendered differences within these experiences. Women, whether as mothers, wives, or relatives, appear in the missionary record primarily as symbols of waiting, loss, and emotional resilience rather than as agents in their own right. This representational pattern is itself significant: it reflects both the realities of women's constrained position within these structures and the narrative conventions through which missionary reporters chose to document them. One telling example is Dasalu's mother, who was baptized on 31 October 1852,

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[35] "William Doherty, the native catechist of Ishagga," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 123–125. CA2 O35 Samuel W. Doherty, "A short story of the time of my father's captivity," no. 7. During his visit to Abomey to rescue his father, he found that there were more people still alive, fourth men Uniah and Peter Doherty, William Jones, Peter Lasiku (a schoolboy), and five women: Rebecca Lashiku, Rebecca Ambosseh, Jinny Ayawo, Lucy Ayawo (a schoolgirl), Amelia Lashiku (also a schoolgirl).
[36] "Note on the pictures on pages 30 and 31," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1885, 32.
[37] "The Dahomians," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 116. In Rev. C.A.C Gollmer's Journal. Jan. 16, 1852.

taking the name Elizabeth, having converted to Christianity in the belief that she would never see her son again.[38]

This dynamic is particularly evident in the case of Martha Dasalu, whose experience offers a rare glimpse into the vulnerable position of women within both kinship and missionary structures. Described as a communicant from Abeokuta and as the wife of one of Crowther's worthy communicants, Martha is presented in the sources as "much distressed, and with tears in her eyes;"[39] she faced not only the uncertainty of her husband's fate but also hostility from both her affinal and natal families due to her conversion to Christianity. At one point, "she was just about being expelled by her husband's elder brother, and others in the family,"[40] while her own kin expressed strong disapproval of her religious affiliation.

The news of her husband's survival dramatically altered her circumstances: "His wife was almost mad with joy."[41] Yet this moment of relief also exposed underlying tensions, as Dasalu's brother, who had already appropriated his property, remained unwilling to accept his survival. The account from 1852 concludes with the expectation that funds would be raised for his redemption, further illustrating how kinship, property, and missionary intervention intersected to shape these experiences. A later publication in the *Gleaner* of 1885 provides additional detail about Dasalu's enslavement: "For twelve nights…, he remained a prisoner, first at Abomey, then at Whydah for three years, and then was sold to a slaver, and transported to Cuba, whence, after a time, he was set free on the intervention of the British Government."[42] From the available records, Martha Dasalu's subsequent circumstances remain undocumented.

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[38] *"*Abbeokuta, and it's converts*,"* *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, vol. III, 1853, 75.
[39] "The Dahomians," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1867, 116. In Rev. C.A. Gollmer's Journal. Jan. 16, 1852.
[40] *Church Missionary Papers,* Christmas, 1852, 4.
[41] Church *Missionary Papers,* Christmas, 1852, 4.
[42] "Note on the pictures on pages 30 and 31*,*" *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1885, 32.
According to Ojo, Dasalu, later known as Nicolas Lucumi, was captured after Crowther converted him to Christianity in Abeokuta. He was transported to Havana in 1854 aboard the Grey Eagle, which was intercepted off

On the return journey to the Bight of Benin, some of the "Liberated Africans" accompanied Townsend back to Yorubaland. During his visit to Abeokuta on January 7, 1843, Townsend recorded in his journal the "interesting recognitions" made by the missionaries travelling with him. Andrew Wilhelm identified numerous close relatives after an absence of twenty years, having left his homeland as a youth. However, it was John M'Cormack, "who was sent also with Townsend at 'the expense of the Hastings People'," who provides the most striking account of family reconnection. As Townsend noted, "The joy felt and expressed at meeting them again may be imagined. He has come to me several times, with deep emotion, to tell me of some relative whom he had seen."[43] In Abeokuta, M'Cormack discovered his sister in the marketplace as they passed through. Approaching her under the pretext of a purchase and thinking he recognized her, he called her by his sister's name; she responded immediately, and it was confirmed that she was indeed his sister.[44]

This was not the first occasion on which John M'Cormack had located close relatives. He had previously done so in Sierra Leone, where he discovered his daughter. As recorded in Townsend's journal, he was asked about his children prior to his forced removal from his country and whether they were still alive. He replied that one had died, while the other, like himself, had been enslaved and brought to Sierra Leone. The account of their encounter is particularly striking. While walking with a friend on the road from Hastings to Waterloo, they

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Cuba. There, he was able to send a letter to the Church Missionary Society, for whom he had previously worked before being enslaved. The CMS, with assistance from the British Foreign Office and using his tag as a clue, located him and arranged his release. In 1856, he was sent back to Lagos via England as a free man. Olatunji Ojo, "John Baptiste Dasalu or Nicolas Lucumi and the Nineteenth Century Cuban-Lagos Connection," paper presented at the Kitchener-Waterloo Black History Month *Workshop*, 4 February 2008. Richard Anderson, Alex Borucki, Daniel Domingues da Silva, David Eltis, Paul Lachance, Philip Misevich, Olatunji Ojo, "Using African Names to Identify the Origins of Captives in the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Crowdsourcing and the Registers of Liberated Africans, 1808–1862," *History in Africa*, 40 (2013), 180.

[43] "Endeavours to carry the Gospel into the interior of Africa. Interesting Recognitions," Townsend journal, *The Church Missionary*, 1843, 126.

[44] "Endeavours to carry the Gospel into the interior of Africa. Interesting Recognitions," Townsend journal, *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1843, 126.

encountered a young woman. After passing her, his companion observed that she appeared to be from his country; M'Cormack initially disagreed, but returned to inquire, "…he went back to her and asked who she was; and found, to his great surprise and pleasure, that she was his own child. She had, before this, married, and was residing near where he found her."[45] The contingency of this reunion, dependent on a chance encounter and a companion's observation, underscores how profoundly the disruption of enslavement had severed even the most intimate kinship bonds.

The African individuals who accompanied missionaries such as M'Cormack or Wilhelm were frequently searching for family members, and these encounters also became moments through which relatives were subsequently encouraged to convert to Christianity. As some reported, relatives expressed willingness to "…become Christians too, if Missionaries come and teach them."[46] These accounts collectively demonstrate how reunion narratives were framed in the missionary record not only as emotional or familial events but as opportunities to expand Christianity through kinship networks, a framing that must be kept in mind when reading these sources as evidence of women's and families' own motivations and experiences.

The narrative of Thomas King provides a particularly detailed account of the gendered and generational impact of enslavement, as experienced by his mother, sister, and niece. As King recalled, "My mother and his elder sister, about a fortnight previous, went to Ishaga, a town about fourteen or fifteen miles distant, for trade. (…) I and my niece, my sister's daughter, were the little ones that were left at home."[47] Following the violent attack on their town around 1825, his mother returned at great personal risk in search of her children, only to find that her son had

[45] "Endeavours to carry the Gospel into the interior of Africa. Interesting Recognitions," Townsend journal, *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1843, 126.
[46] "Endeavours to carry the Gospel into the interior of Africa. Interesting Recognitions," Townsend journal, *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1843, 126.
[47] "How Thomas King Became a Slave," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1850–51, 138.

already been taken. She herself was subsequently captured during the destruction of the town, together with her granddaughter, and both were sold into slavery for a small sum before being separated through resale, a pattern of secondary fragmentation that compounded the original violence of capture.

Over the following years, Thomas King's mother passed through the hands of six or seven owners, moving between Ijebu and Lagos, where she remained in servitude for extended periods. Despite occasional proximity to family members, opportunities for reunion were limited by the conditions of slavery and by not finding anyone able to secure her redemption. Her eventual escape during unrest in Lagos and subsequent arrival in Abeokuta, where her redemption was secured through missionary intervention by Samuel Crowther, marked the end of a prolonged trajectory of displacement and forced labour. The fate of his niece, however, goes unrecorded, another of the silences that mark the limits of the archive. As for his sister, Thomas King was informed that she was brought to Porto Novo, where her master took her as his wife, and she had four children. Thomas King was reunited with his elderly mother after twenty-five years.[48]

b. Accounts of Conversion

Missionary periodicals provide a series of illustrative cases that, when read together, reveal recurring patterns in women's conversion, persecution, religious negotiation, and participation in the spread of Christianity across different West African contexts. From the 1850s through the 1890s, several cases were documented across multiple locations, including Lagos, Badagry, Ibadan, and Abeokuta. In many of these accounts, women were described in

[48] "How Thomas King Became a Slave," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1850–51, 138–141. Journal Extracts of Thomas King for Quarter ending 25 June 1850, CMS Yoruba Mission, CA2 O61 36. Richard Anderson*, African Narratives of Slavery and Abolition. Testimonies from the 19th century* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 99–102.

missionary language as “heathen women” or “stubborn idolaters,” who, often in old age, ultimately renounce their beliefs, receive baptism, and abandon their idols. Cases of girls and young women converting to Christianity were also documented. These accounts revealed that conversion was not merely a personal or spiritual decision, but a socially embedded process that frequently provoked conflict within both domestic and communal spheres, and that the way these stories were told reflected the priorities and expectations of the missionaries who recorded them as much as the experiences of the women themselves

One of the earliest of these cases dated to 1853 and was associated with Abeokuta, where the mother of John Baptist Dasalu, subsequently baptized as Elizabeth, embraced Christianity following the capture of her son by the Dahomian army. A more detailed account from the same year appears in the case of Ige, an adult Yoruba woman in Lagos, whose conversion was recorded under the title “What have I to do any more with idols?”[49] As a Sunday-school student, she made the decisive choice to renounce her idols, even in the presence of a priestess to whom she had previously been attached. Mr. James White visited her house on April 6, 1853, where “We found that she had assembled her relatives together, and we read and prayed with them; and after encouraging her, she brought me her Shango, Elegbara, Osoyin, Obatala, and Ifa. Notwithstanding the violent opposition of her enemies, she stood firm and undaunted in her faith.”[50] Her public rejection of idolatry was not only a personal transformation but also a socially visible act; she defended her decision before a wider audience, influenced her husband’s conversion, and persuaded another woman and her father to follow. Ige’s case thus illustrated

[49] “What have I to do any more with idols?,” *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1854, 63–66.
[50] “What have I to do any more with idols?,” *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1854, 64.

how women's conversions could generate broader networks of religious influence within their communities.[51]

While Ige's case foregrounds individual conviction and influence, following reports emphasized the social tensions that often accompany such decisions. Omoyeni, a female slave, was removed to a distant farm by her master because he did not agree with her desire to become a Christian. Subsequently, she was redeemed by Mr. Townsend.[52] A later account describes a woman baptized as Christiana Obonné,[53] whose conversion provoked immediate opposition from her husband during the ritual itself. This incident occurred within a broader context of restrictions imposed by local authorities, including a proclamation limiting attendance at Christian worship: "None, except the school-children and all who had before been educated at school… can attend any house of God…"[54] Despite attempts by Crowther to negotiate with the chiefs, persecution persisted, culminating in acts of violence, including the martyrdom of a convert. This case underscored how women's conversion could trigger both domestic conflict and wider communal repression.

Alongside these accounts of opposition, other cases revealed how conversion intersected with family fragmentation and the incorporation of girls into missionary structures. The report "Past and Present at Lagos" presented two interconnected cases involving women and children. In the first, a young girl named Ewumi, "who was with her mother in the farm, and was carrying some produce down the canoe at the waterside…," was asked by the missionary Rev. J.A. Lamb whether she would like to go and live with him and learn from God. He then requested

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[51] "What have I to do any more with idols?," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1854, 65–66.
[52] M.A.S. Barber, *Oshielle: or, Village life in the Yoruba country; from the journals and letters of a catechist there, describing the rise of a Christian church in an African village* (James Nisbet and co., 1857), 194–196.
[53] "Persecution at Bonny- Martyrdom of a Convert," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1876, 93.
[54] "Persecution at Bonny- Martyrdom of a Convert," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1876, 93.

permission from her mother, who deferred to the father, described as an 'idol worshipper'. The father initially consented but later removed her from the school.[55] In the second case, a woman fled with her three-year-old daughter from Ode, the capital of the Ijebu country, to Lagos. The father of her children, Joseph Odusanwo, subsequently came to Lagos, renounced Ifa, and was baptized. The Governor of Lagos intervened, ordering that the mother be separated from her children, who were returned to their father and placed under the care of Mrs. Lamb at the Mission House. The daughter, originally named Amina, was baptized as Alice Prichard, after Mrs. Lamb's mother. She later came under the care of Mrs. Nathaniel Johnson, formerly Zenobia Phillips, who had been trained by Miss Vivian at St. Mark's Infant School in Bath and at Mrs. Woodfall's Orphanage, and who was at the time of writing the wife of Mr. N. Johnson, catechist at Lagos and brother of Rev. H. Johnson, and was supported by the Missionary Leaves Association. The relocation of the child into missionary care illustrated how conversion could entail the reorganization of kinship ties and the incorporation of women and children into mission networks, with consequences that extended well beyond the moment of baptism.[56]

Reports from Abeokuta also indicated a steady growth of Christian communities and greater involvement of women. At the Abeokuta Baptist station, missionary work among children and adults resulted in numerous conversions. From August 1859 until March 1860, approximately seventy children were gathered, "some of them of rather mature ages,"[57] with older children proving more resistant to conversion than younger ones. Among them was a girl, about seventeen years old, described as "very vicious and quarrelsome," whose gradual emotional and spiritual transformation was recorded in detail, including her eventual religious

[55] "Past and Present at Lagos," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1874, 116.
[56] "Past and Present at Lagos," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1874, 116.
[57] "Abeokuta Baptist station," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1863, 47.

conviction and her subsequent influence on her mother's religious practice.[58] In 1875, an unidentified woman from Abeokuta pursued conversion because she believed that "the heathen doesn't have mutual love and sympathy,"[59] contrasting this with what she perceived as Christianity's community spirit. Her sustained commitment despite persecution and her regular attendance at church and class meetings highlighted the role of moral and emotional motivations in driving religious change,[60] motivations that the missionary record preserved, though invariably filtered through its own interpretive framework.

A parallel but geographically distinct trajectory was evident in Sierra Leone, where conversion was often linked to the experiences of "Liberated Africans." The case of Mammy Hagar, described by Rev. G. Nicol as an Ebo woman brought to the colony approximately forty years ago by British cruisers, illustrated a long-term process of Christian incorporation.[61] Baptized by the late Missionary Johnson and residing in Regent, Sierra Leone, she had at the time of her baptism confessed that "she did not understand the nature and requirements of the Gospel,"[62] yet she was remembered as 'a consistent and humble member' until her death in December. Despite her poverty and widowhood, having lost her husband years earlier, and relying on charity and a small government allowance of two pence daily, she paid her class contributions weekly and supported the Church Missionary Society, the Bible Society, and every cause presented in her parish. Though she never learned to read, when she fell seriously ill three years before her death, she cited passages from the Bible from memory. A large community of Christian friends accompanied her remains to the grave. Her case illustrated how Christian

[58] "Abeokuta Baptist station," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1863, 47–48,
[59] "Lay Helpers and Prayer Meetings at Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1875, 57.
[60] "Lay Helpers and Prayer Meetings at Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 57.
[61] "Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1868, 33-35, *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 204, 1866.
[62] "Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1868, 33.

incorporation could become a source of communal belonging, survival and social identity for women who had been displaced and dispossessed by the slave trade.

This trajectory of gradual incorporation and sustained commitment can be contrasted with, yet also complemented by, cases of late-life conversion, such as that recorded in "Found After Many Days," which concerns an elderly African woman of Popo origin in Sierra Leone, observed on July 8, 1875. Described in missionary discourse as a "heathen woman of great age" and a "very bold and stubborn idolatress,"[63] she had long adhered to local religious practices, reportedly as a devotee of thunder worship. Despite her advanced age and severe illness, she ultimately renounced her idols and received baptism under the name Jane C. From the time of her baptism and 'renunciation of idolatry' to her death approximately three months later, she remained within the Christian fold.[64] Her case exemplified a recurring pattern in missionary narratives in which conversion occurred at the end of life, framed simultaneously as moral resolution and spiritual culmination. The emphasis placed on her prior stubbornness, however, also underscored how such accounts were constructed to dramatize the triumph of Christianity over long-standing adherence to indigenous religious systems, a narrative purpose that shaped what was recorded and how it was presented.

Taken together, these cases reveal a spectrum of experiences rather than a linear narrative of Christian progress. Women appeared as central figures in processes of conversion, whether as initiators, resistors, or mediators within families and communities. Their experiences were frequently marked by conflict, displacement, and negotiation, reflecting the broader social transformations associated with the spread of Christianity in nineteenth-century West Africa. At the same time, the manner in which these stories were told, selected, framed, and published for

[63] "Gleanings from recent letters. Found After Many Days," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1876, 56.
[64] "Gleanings from recent letters. Found After Many Days," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 56–57.

metropolitan audiences, shaped the limits of what can be known about the women themselves, their own understandings of conversion, and the full complexity of the lives they led.

B. Role of women in the missions through the times

a. Women's Roles

Missionary sources such as the *Gleaner* offer scattered yet valuable insights into women's roles in everyday life in nineteenth-century Yoruba and Sierra Leonean contexts. When read together, these accounts reveal that women's activities were embedded in domestic organization, economic exchange, and religious practice, while also intersecting with forms of social control and, at times, persecution. As with the sources examined in previous sections, these glimpses into women's lives were mediated by missionary observers writing for metropolitan audiences, and they preserved aspects of women's experience primarily when they served broader narrative or evangelical purposes.

The accounts highlight the organization of family life and the gender-specific roles within it. In Abeokuta, for instance, the report "Abbeokuta and its people"[65] noted that families did not eat together; rather, men and women occupied distinct spaces, with husbands dining separately while women prepared food and cared for children. This arrangement highlights both the centrality of women within the household and the gendered organization of daily routines that structured domestic life across the region.

Beyond the domestic sphere, women played a visible role in local economies, particularly in markets and caravan trade. Reports from Isein described the evening market as a central social and economic space, where "men, women, girls, travellers… flock in to buy, and sell, and

[65] "Abbeokuta and its people," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1851, 188.

talk."[66] The case of Meroke, an Egba woman from Oshielle who served as a priestess of Oshoosi, the god of hunters, and also worked as a market trader, offered one of the more detailed portraits of women's economic activity in the missionary record. Before going to the market, Meroke purchased her breakfast at the gate of her compound from an Eleko woman selling eko: "She bears on her head a large calabash, filled with little pots of a white substance, like blancmange, carefully folded between two large leaves; it is made of Indian corn."[67] She supplemented this with akara, described as "…little round ball, made of beans, hard corn, and the seed of wild melons."[68] At the market itself, she sold palm oil collected in calabashes, purchasing it from the men who extracted it from the trees.[69] Meroke's case illustrated how women's economic roles extended across multiple spheres, religious, domestic, and commercial, in ways that the missionary record only partially captured.

The economic precariousness that could accompany women's lives in this context was illustrated by the case of Lubakeh, a palm-oil producer from Oshielle who had converted to Christianity. Indebted to four creditors from Abeokuta and Oshielle, she offered money to the orisas in an attempt to resolve her financial difficulties, only to accumulate further debt, a situation that ultimately prevented her from continuing to attend school.[70] Her case revealed how economic vulnerability could constrain women's engagement with missionary institutions, even after conversion, and how the boundaries between indigenous religious practice and Christian affiliation remained porous and negotiated in practice.

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[66] "Isein, a town in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1858, 26.
[67] M.A.S. Barber, *Oshielle: or, Village life in the Yoruba country; from the journals and letters of a catechist there, describing the rise of a Christian church in an African village* (James Nisbet and co., 1857), 15.
[68] Barber, *Oshielle: or, Village life in the Yoruba country,* 15.
[69] M.A.S. Barber, *Oshielle: or, Village life in the Yoruba country,* 16. Meroke's story is intricate; she initially resists conversion. She confronts her community, and even the catechist Barber doubts her conversion because of her role as a priestess. They attempt to persuade her to return to her idols. Ultimately, she is baptized on May 22, 1858, and adopts the name Martha Meroke.
[70] M.A.S. Barber, *Oshielle: or, Village life in the Yoruba country,* 115–121.

This broader portrayal of women's economic activity was reinforced by later accounts of travelling populations and market interactions, including the report "A conversation with Yoruba Market Women,"[71] which collectively underscored women's active participation in commerce, mobility, and everyday exchange. Visual representations further confirmed this pattern, as seen in the 1879 report depicting women preparing eko, which situated women's labour at the intersection of domestic and public economies.[72]

At the same time, women's lives were closely intertwined with local religious practices and restrictions. Participation in traditions such as Ifá[73] coexisted with missionary prohibitions against idol worship and related practices. These tensions were not merely ideological but could carry severe consequences. Accusations of witchcraft, for instance, could result in extreme forms of violence, as illustrated by the case of a Christian woman in Onitsha who, suspected by her own sons, was forced to ingest a ritual substance and died as a result.[74] Such episodes revealed how women's positions within both indigenous and Christian frameworks could render them particularly vulnerable to communal violence and social sanction.

The physical toll of women's labour was also documented, albeit briefly, in the missionary record. An account from the Niger expedition recorded by Crowther in 1857 described a woman who had been robbed of all her possessions, one illustration among several of the precarious material conditions in which many women lived. Women were responsible for feeding and caring for their children, grinding corn late into the night and beginning again early in the morning, preparing flour and selling it from house to house to sustain their families. As

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[71] "A conversation with Yoruba Market Women," 1875 January, 9.
[72] "A Street Breakfast in Abeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1879, 135
[73] "What I Saw in Africa. Sketches of Missionary Life in the Yoruba Country. IV. About Ifa, and the Babalawos," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 69–70.
[74] "The Juju house, Bonny," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1867, 88. Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change* (Indiana University Press, 2009), 208.

one observer noted, “It’s no wonder they tire easily — many look like they’re in their forties by age thirty,”[75] a rare moment in the missionary record in which the cumulative weight of women’s daily labour was acknowledged, even if only in passing.

> “As the boat was getting ready, we observed a poor Nupi woman kneeling close by on the bank in deep grief, which she now and then gave vent to with heavy sobs. Before we had time to take sufficient notice of her, one of Abd Al Kader’s followers, with the greediness of a wolf, snatched a plantain out of her hand - the remainder of the little provision she had prepared for herself and the child at home. (…) The poor woman was thus plundered of all she possessed. (...) When the poor things lose their children by death or slavery- and a mother’s love is of the same nature all over the world - they have no hope for the future for them. “I tried”, says our native Missionary on one such occasion, “to soothe the sorrows of a mother who had lost her daughter, and directed her to trust in God, for what He does now is for our good. I listened to her sorrowful tale with an aching heart.”[76]

b. Roles within Family Structures

Missionary narratives frequently situated women within familial roles, though often in ways that obscure their individual identities. Women were commonly referred to as daughters, wives, or widows, rather than by name, reflecting both the priorities of missionary reporting and the gendered framing of African social life within the sources. Nonetheless, certain cases provided more specific insight into the family networks surrounding these women. Susanna, the daughter of Bishop Crowther, for instance, married Rev. G. Nicol,[77] while another of Crowther’s daughters was widowed, as noted in the announcement of T. B. Macaulay’s death.[78] These

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[75] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 127, 1860, 3.
[76] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 127, 1860, 3.
[77] “Bishop Crowther: His Life and Work (VI. Abeokuta -continued),” *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1878, 71.
[78] “Epitome of Missionary News,” *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1878, 48. Thomas Babington Macaulay, son of “Liberated African parents,” was the eldest son of freed Africans from Oyo - Ojo Oriare and Kilange. He was born in Kissey, Sierra Leone, on 17 January 1826. His early education took place at CMS schools in Freetown, followed by studies at the Fourah Bay Institution and the CMS Training College in Islington. Returning in 1851, he worked as a tutor at Freetown’s Grammar School and later led the Regent station there. In 1852, he joined the Yoruba Mission, serving at the Igbein and Owu stations in Abeokuta. After his ordination in 1854, he married Abigail Crowther, Samuel Crowther’s second daughter. By 1859, he had moved to Lagos and established the CMS Grammar School, where he served as principal until his death in a smallpox epidemic on 17 January 1878. Alongside his teaching, he

references, brief as they were, illustrated how women's identities in the missionary record were consistently defined in relation to the men around them, fathers, husbands, or sons, rather than through their own activities or commitments.

Visual materials published alongside textual accounts reinforced these familial framings. Images in the *Gleaner* depicted women as mothers and caregivers, including a Yoruba mother carrying a child[79] and women engaged in domestic production, such as dyeing cloth beside their daughters.[80] These visual representations complemented textual accounts by emphasizing the centrality of women in both family and economic life, while simultaneously reproducing the domesticating gaze through which missionary publications tended to present African women to their metropolitan readership.[81]

Cases referencing baptism frequently highlighted whether husbands approved or disapproved of their wives' conversion, underscoring the extent to which women's religious decisions remained subject to male authority within the domestic sphere. The baptism of Erubami, who abandoned his idols and was accompanied by two women, each married to a pagan husband, illustrated this dynamic clearly. One of these women, Aribigde, baptized as Matilda, faced persecution from her husband, who used violence in an attempt to force her back into paganism. Another, Ajai, baptized as Ann, was told explicitly that "…your husband and other relatives are heathens and enemies to the Christian cause."[82] Both women were baptized on 29 December in Otta, in the presence of their families, an act that simultaneously marked their

translated parts of the Bible into Yoruba. Jean Herskovits Koyptoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria. The "Sierra Leonians" in Yoruba, 1830 – 1890* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 294.

[79] "Negro Clergyman at Nazareth," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1874, 139.

[80] "What I Saw in Africa. Sketches of Missionary Life in the Yoruba Country. II An African Home in Abeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 34-36.

[81] The visual representations from newspapers are studied in Chapter 5.

[82] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 218, 1873.

religious commitment and their willingness to navigate the conflicts that conversion generated within their households.

Cases referencing the deaths of converts similarly defined women through their familial and social positions. The death of Princess Sarah Bikotan was reported by James White in 1879. Bikotan had been among the earliest women baptized by Rev. Townsend, alongside Crowther's mother, on 5 February 1848.[83] The daughter of the King of Ighesa, she was married to Legegere of the royal Ake family in Abeokuta, her mother's family being from Otta. Their house was among the first to receive missionaries arriving in Abeokuta in 1846. After her husband's death, she relocated from Abeokuta to Otta, where she led the female converts, exemplifying patience, humility, zeal, and devotion until her death on 26 June.[84] Her case was notable not only for the length and consistency of her Christian commitment but also for her background and the degree of leadership she exercised within the female convert community, a form of influence that the missionary record acknowledged, even as it framed her life primarily through her familial connections and her relationship to the male missionaries who had baptized and guided her.

c. Education, Schoolmistress and the Formation of Female Christian Subjects

The role of women and girls within missionary education constituted another important dimension of this process. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, female education was increasingly institutionalized, particularly in Sierra Leone. At Charlotte, the most prominent building after the stone church was the school for "Liberated African girls," conducted by agents of the Church Missionary Society at the government's expense, the same institution in which Anna Kilham, a member of the Society of Friends, had previously taught "poor Black girls." All

[83] "Death of One of the Firstfruits of Abeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1879, 64.
[84] "Death of One of the Firstfruits of Abeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1879, 64.

young girls found on captured slave vessels were brought to this school for education and instruction, which meant that the number of admissions fluctuated according to the activity of the slave trade. As a report published in the *Gleaner* in 1855 noted, "…the last few years the girls have amounted to between sixty and one hundred."[85] They received instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, needlework, and religion, all conducted in English.

A significant shortage of 'sufficiently qualified schoolmistresses' undermined these efforts, and women's educational attainment lagged behind that of men, a situation that, in the missionary framing, made it difficult for educated young men 'to find suitable partners in life,' and that was offered as a justification for the establishment of a dedicated female institution. The stated expectation was that girls would remain at school until they reached marriageable age, after which "many of them become useful members of the rising negro society of Sierra Leone as wives and mothers."[86] A formulation that revealed the extent to which female education was conceived primarily as preparation for domesticity rather than for independent professional roles.

Reports from the Female Institution at Regent,[87] which was under the direction of Miss Sophia Hehlen after December 1846,[88] emphasize systematic instruction aimed at producing

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[85] "A Picture of Sierra Leone in the Light of Christianity," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1855, 54.
[86] "A Picture of Sierra Leone in the Light of Christianity," *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1855, 64.
[87] "The instruction of the females in the Institution at Regent is efficient and systematic," in "General view of the West Africa Mission," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1846, 112. Report on the public worship, attendance 6068, the construction of seven new churches, and several school-houses. The number of Communicants 1521 and the Candidates for baptism 1502. The 46 Schools and seminaries have 5305 students, both children and adults. Grammar School opened 25 March 1845 in Freetown for advanced scholars from the day-schools, starting with 16 pupils. "General view of the West Africa Mission," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1846, 111–113. Also, in The *Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1849, 100, there is a report on schoolchildren in Sierra Leone, Regent, and the Female Institute. The girls and boys from the schools received New Year's gifts, cloth, and books.
[88] "Education in Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1847, 73–75. Miss Hehlen served in Sierra Leone for 18 1/2 years and was absent for 5 3/4 years (1851, May to England; 1852 to Sierra Leone; 1856, June 24 to England; 1857, Nov. 26 to Sierra Leone). The Girls' School, commenced by Miss Anne Christiana Morris at Regent, was moved to Kissey under Miss Hehlen and subsequently to Freetown, where it developed under Miss Sass into the present "Annie Walsh Memorial School." Miss Hehlen went to England in May 1862; on May 20, the connexion closed. Church Missionary Society, *Register of Missionaries, (Clerical, Lay, and Female) and Native Clergy, from 1804-1894* (London, Gilbert and Rivington, Ld.), 264. The Registers indicate that Miss Hehlen worked in the Girls' School after Morris, and *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, from 1847 mentioned the Female Institution after Mr. Denton and Mrs. Denton, "Education in Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1847, 74. The

schoolmistresses alongside training in household duties. In addition, "…most of the married missionaries receive into their families two or three of the more promising girls from the Village Schools, with a view to give them a superior education."[89] Later accounts documented the expansion of day schools and vocational training, including sewing classes,[90] and noted the extension of educational initiatives beyond Sierra Leone to other regions, including the establishment of female institutions in Lagos.[91]

The quality of instruction at these institutions was recognized in official inspections. In 1890, during the Government Inspector's examination of the girls of the Female Institution under Miss Goddall and Miss Higgins, the reading was declared to be "the best of the Coast," and in plain needlework, the girls were far ahead of all others, with six prizes awarded to the Institution. Miss Goddall wrote about the girls: "Our dear girls have worked really well throughout the year; we knew that before he told us… I hope it will encourage the parents to send their girls at a younger age."[92] The Governor expressed particular satisfaction with the cooking and offered a prize for the best-cooked dish, a detail that underscored the continued emphasis on domestic skills alongside academic achievement.[93]

Journal Extracts from Miss Hehlen to Rev. Venn mention the Female Institution reports from Freetown, 1847, and from Kissey, 1848-1849. CA 1 10 114 4.

[89] Female Institution at Regent, in "Education in Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1847, 74.

[90] "A letter from Regent's town," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1867, 134–137. Regent town, "home of some from amongst the many poor negroes, who, having been liberated from the slave-ships, were set on shore at Sierra Leone (...) Full of grovelling and malignant superstitions, greegrees, red-water, witchcraft, devils' houses…," 135. On December 7th, 1818, was held the first anniversary of the Missionary Association of Regent's Town. By 1867, Regent's town is no longer a Missionary station, is one of the parishes of the Sierra Leone Church, under Rev. George Nicol.
June 14th "Our day school is increasing in numbers. Mrs. Nicol's sewing girls' number about thirty. Without your aid, and that of some of my friends, it would be difficult for us to procure materials, needles, thimbles, &c., for such a large number of children. They do not bring these things with them to school. We always remember our neighbouring parish, when we have any to spare," 136.

[91] "Female Institution at Lagos," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1878, 119–120.

[92] Church Missionary Society. *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society 1890*, Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, 25.

[93] Church Missionary Society. *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society 1890*, Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, 26.

Individual cases of academic distinction were also documented. At examinations in Bonny on scripture, spelling, reading, and writing, one of those who recited best was a girl of about nine years of age named Hanah Uranta, of whom Crowther observed that, "Having no mark on her face, and being quite used to English dress, together with her distinct pronunciation and tolerably good English accent, one would have taken her for a girl from Sierra Leone, or other civilized place, than from rude, uncultivated and uncivilized Bonny…"[94] Crowther also emphasized, more broadly, the importance of women's education, noting that educated mothers frequently exerted a positive influence on their children, laying a strong and lasting foundation for learning and for future generations. This was a rare acknowledgement within the missionary record of women's intellectual and pedagogical agency, but in service of the Church.

These institutions not only provided literacy and practical skills but also facilitated the incorporation of girls into missionary households, where selected students received advanced training.[95] The case of Sarah Forbes Bonetta illustrated the intersection of education, gender, and colonial structures with particular clarity.[96] Born around 1843 with the name Àìná, she was captured at the age of five during a Dahomey assault on her hometown in 1848.[97] After a period in London, she was placed at the CMS Female Institution in Kissy, Sierra Leone, under Miss Sass's supervision from 1851 to 1855, before continuing her studies in Britain and eventually marrying. Her name, as Henry Lovejoy has noted, epitomized British abolitionism, and her

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[94] "Examination of the Bonny schoolchildren," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1870, 27–31. In the same publication, they note that the number of schoolchildren has fallen. Some chiefs sent their children to England, but the education, especially for girls, was disappointing. In Brass, Bishop Crowther plans to open schools for girls free of charge, not for boys.

[95] "Education in Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1847, 74.

[96] "The Story of King Gezo's Gift to Queen Victoria," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1880, 7, 134–135. To know more about Bonetta, see: Henry B. Lovejoy, *Becoming Sarah Bonetta. A Yorùbá Woman in Queen Victoria's Court* (University of Toronto Press, Forthcoming).

[97] From 1850 to 1851, she was in Windsor, and then she was placed in the C.M.S. Female Institution in Kissy, Sierra Leone until 1855. She later studied at a well-known school in Brighton and eventually married an African merchant, Mr. J.P.L. Davies, in the same city. Henry B. Lovejoy, *Becoming Sarah Bonetta*, 1.

trajectory, from captive child to educated woman within imperial and missionary networks, encapsulated both the possibilities and the constraints that such institutions offered to African girls.

The commitment of African women to sustaining these institutions was also documented. When the Female Institution at Lagos was threatened with closure due to Mrs. Roper's declining health and sudden departure for England, Mrs. Davies volunteered to manage it until a new leader could be sent from England, attending regularly and maintaining its operations.[98] As Mrs. Nicholson, wife of Rev. L. Nicholson, recorded: "…in the work of collecting funds and in the bazaars in aid of the same, we always found her willing and ready to do her part, taking a deep interest in all the work of the Church, teaching in the Sunday-school, until her health failing, she was compelled to give it up. Her influence with her own people was very weighty, especially with the young women who felt they could always go in their difficulties to Mrs. Davies, and be sure of her kind and judicious counsel and help."[99] This account illustrated how African women such as Mrs. Davies assumed roles of institutional leadership and community guidance that exceeded the subordinate positions formally assigned to them within the missionary hierarchy.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of female scholars and female workers were located in Sierra Leone and the Yoruba Native Church rather than in the CMS stations. According to the CMS Proceedings and its annual report for 1890, there were 3,913 African girl scholars out of a total of 8,290 scholars across the missions, and 104 African women were employed across 48 stations in the West African missions, compared to just 8 European workers.[100] Figures that testified to the extent to which African women had become the primary

[98] "The Story of King Gezo's Gift to Queen Victoria," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1880, 134–135.
[99] "The Story of King Gezo's Gift to Queen Victoria," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1880, 134–135.
[100] CMS Yoruba Mission in Coast District: Lagos Christ Church, Grammar School, Training School, Female Insitution, Badagry, Leke, Itebu, Ayesan. Interior District: Abeokuta, Sunren, Ondo, Ilsa, Ibadan Kudeti; Aremo,

human infrastructure of missionary education in the region, even as formal authority and recognition remained concentrated in European hands. These figures are summarized in the table below.

Table 4.1. Extracts from the Statistical View of the Society's Missions, June 1, 1890.

Missions	Number of Stations	Missionaries, Pastors, teachers, &. C.		Scholars
West Africa		**Europeans Females**	**Female African (native) Christians**	**Girls – African (native)**[101]
Sierra Leone CMS	2	2	8	115
Sierra Leone – Native Church	16	.	41	2769
Yoruba CMS	10	5	9	178
Yoruba Native Church	6	.	25	605
Niger	14	1	21	246
Total	48	8	104	3913

Source: Church Missionary Society. Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society 1890 (Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square), xviii-xix.

d. Roles as Catechists, Helpers, and Communicants

Alongside the educational framework examined in the previous section, missionary accounts also documented the increasing involvement of women within Christian institutions, particularly as communicants, helpers, and informal agents of religious work. Early evidence from Sierra Leone recorded the reflections of a female communicant on the importance of

Oke Ogunpa, Oyo, Iseyin. Native Church Coast District: Breadfruit: St.Peters, Ebute Ero, Aroloya, King's Chapel, Itolo, Massey, Okepopo, Iganmu, Ido Island; Ebute Mela: Okuta, Muroko; Isagatedo: Iseri (see Appendix I), Ota, Igbesa. Interior District: Ake, Iporo, Igbore, Ikija, Ikereku, Ilugun, Ijaye, Kerata, Gbagura, Osiele, Ofada, Afojupupa, Agbawon, Asese, Ogbomoso. By this time 7 they had European missionaries and 5 European teachers. In the CMS Missions had 9 Female African (native) Christians/Lay teachers and 4 worked in the Female Institution, and 178 girls' scholars, majority located in Lagos. The *Native Church* employed 25 Females and had 605 girls registered with a majority in Breadfruit. Extract from the Statistic of the Yoruba Mission 1890. Church Missionary Society. *Proceedings* of the Church Missionary Society 1890 (Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square), 30–31.

[101] The term 'native' was replaced by African in this dissertation, and it was kept only in quotations or in parentheses to avoid using the colonial language. Also, for terms like Mahomedan, I used Muslim or for heathen pagan. However, these were the terms used at the time in the sources to refer to the African population.

intercessory prayer, indicating women's engagement with doctrinal and devotional practices from an early stage.[102] The incorporation of converts into mission work was also part of a deliberate institutional strategy: as published in the *Gleaner* in 1855, it was part of the CMS plan that, "the Christian converts have systematically taken up the work of providing for their own sick and needy. I allude to what they call "Christian Companies."[103] This involvement expanded over time into more structured forms of participation, particularly in the Yoruba Mission.

By the mid-nineteenth century, reports indicated that communicants, both male and female, played an active role in visiting the sick and supporting mission activities. As noted in "The Mandingoes," although women were fewer in number, female helpers contributed to the care of the sick and the maintenance of mission communities.[104] Sunday schools and instructional settings similarly relied on the assistance of African catechists, reflecting a growing demand for education and the gradual incorporation of African agents, including women, into the operational structures of missionary work.[105]

Women also appeared in more informal yet significant roles within missionary networks. Cases such as that of Martha Dasalu illustrated the presence of female communicants within Yoruba communities,[106] while other accounts pointed to women acting as unrecognized missionaries, as in the case of Miss White of Otta,[107] or as catechists such as Zenobia Phillips at Lagos, who had received training in London. The involvement of missionaries' wives further complicated the picture of women performing missionary work without formal recognition. A

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[102] "Remark of Female Communicant, at Sierra Leone, on the importance of Intercessory prayer," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1844, 136–137.
[103] "A Picture of Sierra Leone in the Light of Christianity," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1855, 64.
[104] "The Mandingoes," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1852, 13–16. This publication also refers to the "women dress and spin cotton, which is woven into cloth, and dyed, by means of indigo, a rich permanent blue," 14.
[105] "The Husbandry of God," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1848, 73–75.
[106] "The Dahomians," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1867, 116.
[107] "Death of Mrs. White of Otta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1867, 100–106.

letter written in January 1870 in Charlotte, Sierra Leone, by a missionary's wife upon her return to the colony,[108] and reports on church construction in Ibadan that mentioned the sale of Mrs. Hinderer's memory book to raise funds,[109] illustrated how women contributed to the institutional and material development of mission communities through fundraising and organizational work.

A particularly detailed account of women's informal missionary activity appeared in the *Intelligencer* in 1893, in a report by Miss M. Tynan and Miss Wright describing their work in Abeokuta. Noting the substantial number of pagan residents and the extent of the work ahead, their report described four specific cases. The first concerned an unnamed woman so motivated by their visits that she followed them home, after which they expected her daily from the farm where she worked, as she had begun learning a simple prayer.[110] The second involved visits to several pagan women whom they hoped, through growing trust, to form into an inquirers' class: "the heathen are now beginning to come to see us, and we hope in time, with God's help, to form a class for these."[111] The third described two women who had recently been induced to give up a large collection of idols and to attend church regularly, "…with a view of joining the inquirers' class,"[112] a development attributed to the persistent efforts of one "very old, poor, and very infirm woman whom we know. Week after week, she brings them to church…"[113] The fourth highlighted a group of women already active in mission work: "I suppose you have heard of the band of women workers in connexion with the churches of Ake and Iporo; well, they continue to

[108] "Letter written by the wife of a missionary on returning to Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1870, 127–128. In this publication, her name is not mentioned. She gave a report on the welcome back after they left Sierra Leone due to illness. A native matron, Mrs. Nottoge, is mentioned in the report, and the marriage of four girls is noted, "The first week in January, 1870, we had four of our girls married, which as all weddings do, increased our work…," and then it is mentioned that six 'poor little heathen girls' have been admitted, 218. In Charlotte, there was a girls' school.
[109] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1875, 135. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country.*
[110] "The Mission Field West Africa," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1893, 914.
[111] "The Mission Field West Africa," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1893, 914.
[112] "The Mission Field West Africa," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1893, 914.
[113] "The Mission Field West Africa," *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1893, 914.

do a splendid work, preaching…in different parts of the town."[114] The report concluded by acknowledging the importance of language acquisition, noting that the missionaries visited communities with an African interpreter but recognized the need to improve their own command of the language: "We must study the language much, though Miss Wright is wonderfully on in it."[115] This account was notable not only for the women it described but for what it revealed about the layered networks through which Christian practice spread, networks in which African women, named and unnamed, were frequently the most active agents.

In most cases, women who played roles within mission communities were recorded in the missionary sources primarily at moments of illness and death, when they requested visits from a catechist, missionary, or church member. This pattern was consistent across multiple locations, including Sierra Leone, Badagry, Lagos, and Abeokuta. In 1843, the publication 'Simple Piety of a Female Communicant in West Africa' reported the death of a communicant who had been ill for a long period and resided in Kissy, Sierra Leone.[116] Similarly, Rev. Beale's journal of 1846 recorded the case of Hannah Farmer, described as "one of the oldest Communicants of our church in this country,"[117] who, gravely ill, requested the presence of Rev. J. Beale from Freetown; he departed from her house shortly before her death. At her burial, approximately 65 men and 97 women attended, dressed in white, along with others who joined the funeral procession.[118] A comparable case was that of J. T., described as a "lost sheep found," who had been on the verge of confirmation when discovered in sin; during the final stages of her illness, she requested visits and forgiveness, and did not forget to make her subscription to the CMS

[114] "The Mission Field West Africa," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1893, 915.
[115] "The Mission Field West Africa," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1893, 915.
[116] "Simple piety of a female communicant in West Africa," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1843, 63.
[117] "Hopeful death of a communicant in Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1846, 97–98.
[118] "Hopeful death of a communicant in Sierra Leone," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1846, 97–98.

before her death.[119] Jane and Hannah, both described as illiterate women rich in faith, similarly requested missionary visits on their deathbeds; of Hannah, the missionary recorded that "to all my questions in Aku, she replied both in English and Aku."[120]

Several additional cases were documented with varying degrees of detail. In 1866 in Lagos, the death of Hannah Pearse was reported.[121] In 1867, Mr. J. White published an account in the *Gleaner* reporting the death of his wife, Mrs. White of Otta, through which further information about her work in the Otta mission became known.[122] By 1875, several cases of sick women were recorded across Badagry, Abeokuta, and Lagos under the title "Sick and Dying Christians in Yoruba," including Phebe John, wife of the late Mr. John, a scripture reader at Ibadan; Lucy Detuke, described as "…an old, infirm member of our Church, her hands and feet being swollen up, and she was very low,"[123] visited by the African catechist Mr. Samuel Cole on 7 March 1874; and Maria Ekidan from Abeokuta, registered by Samuel Pearce and also known as 'Maria Elese' or 'Omu Alanu,' described as a devoted sister, Egba woman, community elder, and preacher.[124] From Badagry, Elisa Afresi, a Popo convert reported in the *Missionary Papers* as a case of persecution in 1871, was described in an 1875 *Gleaner* publication as aged, blind, weak, and dying.[125] In April 1874, Sarah was visited by Rev. D. Williams, an African pastor at Abeokuta, described as an old woman and a steady communicant on "…a dangerous sick bed, from which she never afterwards rose up," who got sick and could not recover. She told him that

[119] "Lost Sheep Found," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1868, 56.
[120] "Lost Sheep Found," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1868, 6.
[121] "A contrast. Taken from the report of a native pastor in the Yoruba country," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1866, 7.
[122] "Wife of the Rev. J. White, Native Minister at Otta, near Lagos. Communicated by her Husband," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, XVII, 1867, 100-101.
[123] "Sick and dying Christians in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875*,* 37.
[124] "Sick and dying Christians in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875*,* 37.
[125] "Sick and dying Christians in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875*,* 38.

since “I left Sierra Leone, I have never once worshipped idols, but I only hope for forgiveness.”[126]

The deliberate documentation of converted women’s final moments in CMS newspapers served a specific institutional purpose: to demonstrate the depth and authenticity of conversion in overseas missions and to sustain the financial and moral support of metropolitan audiences. Read critically, however, these deathbed accounts also preserved, however partially and indirectly, evidence of women sustained religious commitment, their integration into mission communities over decades, and the networks of care and devotion they both relied upon and helped to maintain.

C. Impact of women’s conversion on the CMS and local society (Persecution)

The relationship between conversion and persecution in nineteenth-century Yorubaland cannot be understood solely through individual *cases but* must first be situated within the broader ideological and institutional frameworks that regulated gender and religious knowledge. Systems such as the Oro institution functioned not only as mechanisms of governance but also as instruments of exclusion and control.[127] The secrecy surrounding Oro, restricted to men, imposed severe limitations on women, who were threatened with death if they transgressed its boundaries.[128] Women were socialized into fear through beliefs that associated its sounds with ancestral voices: Females are led to believe that the noise of a stitch whirled through the air is the voice of their deceased forefathers, and, on hearing it, they hide themselves in the most retired

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[126] “Sick and dying Christians in Yoruba,” *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875*,* 38.
[127] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1850, no. 127.
[128] According to Roper, all meetings of the Ogboni elders’ idol-house are strictly secret and revealing them is a crime punishable by death. “These meetings are held under the protection of an idol named “Oro,” and under the pretence of worshipping it. If a woman even names this idol, she is punished with death. “The idol takes her,” they say; but it leaves her head behind, for it is seen next day on a tree in front of the King’s house.” In Roper’s view, the Muslim and the Orisa priests, allied with the slave traders, sought to eliminate the Christians and their teachers altogether. The language of his publications is more pejorative than that of other CMS journals. E. Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions in West Africa, Facts from Abeokuta.* Part 1. no. 3 (William Hunt and Company, 1869), 15.

corners, and dare not come out until it is over."[129] In this context, converting to Christianity was not merely a shift in belief but a direct confrontation with ingrained authority and gendered power structures.

Early missionary accounts began to document how such structural tensions translated into lived experiences of persecution.[130] Some of the earliest detailed cases recorded by Hinderer appeared in Ibadan.[131] First, a young woman who was in great danger and escaped to Abeokuta from the hands of her persecutors; and then, in an entry dated 6 October, in which he referred to events that had occurred ten months earlier, two young women converts who had faced sustained violence from their own families. As reported by Hinderer, these women had been subjected to prolonged abuse, with one subsequently forced into marriage: "she and her companion -and lately, two others- had to suffer dreadfully from their parents and relatives, and the bride no less from her husband and his relatives: and even a priest from Abeokuta."[132] He continued: "The bride especially has been dragged about, week after week, with ropes, from one relative to another, and repeatedly flogged and lacerated. Both she and her companions have stood firm to this day, but their persecutors are not yet tired…"[133] Despite this violence, and despite the inability of even the head chief or the missionaries to intervene effectively against the families responsible, these women maintained their commitment to Christianity, a form of resilience that the missionary record preserved, even if it could not fully account for the cost.

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[129] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1850, no. 127.
[130] Women often had to flee violence, coercion, or domination by their families and communities, seeking refuge with missionaries supported by Europeans. For example, in 20th-century Gabon, the Catholic Church occasionally provided refuge to women fleeing forced marriages. Jeremy Rich, "Manhood, State Power and Scandals in the Gabon Estuary, 1940-1946," *Outre-mers,* tome 95, no 360-361, (2008): 191-208.
[131] "Ibadan," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1856, 18-20; "The Ijebu country," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1856, 63.
[132] "Ibadan," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1856, 19.
[133] "Ibadan," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1856, 19.

This pattern of familial persecution did not remain isolated but recurred in subsequent accounts, indicating its persistence over time and across regions. By 1868, the case of Abiefu of Oshielle introduces a more complex dynamic, in which outward adherence to Christianity coexisted with continued attachment to local religious practices.[134] Her case suggests that persecution and pressure did not always produce clear ruptures, but could instead generate forms of negotiation, concealment, and dual religious belonging within mission communities, a reminder that the boundaries between conversion and indigenous practice were frequently more porous than missionary narratives acknowledged.

By the 1870s, reports indicated both the intensification of persecution and its geographic diffusion. In Oyo, for instance, cases of family opposition remained severe, with one Christian woman forced to flee the town and seek refuge in Ibadan,[135] a displacement that underscores how conversion could disrupt not only religious identity but also spatial belonging and community ties. Persecution continued to operate through specific institutional mechanisms, particularly the Oro system. A report from 1878 recounted the case of a Yoruba woman who was saved from Oro persecution through the intervention of Rev. James Johnson.[136] This episode highlights both the persistence of traditional control structures and the role of missionary agents in mediating or mitigating their effects.

Within this broader landscape, the case of Moyoade offered a more individualized perspective on persecution and perseverance. Documented in multiple reports, she was described as a young woman whose desire to embrace Christianity was met with strong opposition from her family. Despite being a captive and subjected to sustained pressure, she remained committed

[134] "Abiefu, of Oshielle," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1868, 29-32. See appendix B.
[135] "Epitome of Missionary News," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1874, 96.
[136] "A Yoruba Woman Saved from "Oro," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1878, 33.

to conversion.[137] Her eventual baptism at Ibadan on 25th April, alongside other converts, including the elderly Mele, and "fifteen persons -twelve adults and three children- dear Baba (Mr. Hinderer) and myself officiating together (Daniel Olubi)," was framed as a moment of both spiritual and communal significance, further reinforced by the support of figures such as the chief Kakanfo.[138]

The missionary records show a broad range of experiences where women were involved in persecution, slavery, and religious conflicts, frequently intersecting with local authority and missionary efforts. Collectively, these cases highlight the ongoing presence of violence and accusations, as well as the intricate ways these situations were managed within both African and missionary contexts.

One prominent form of persecution took the form of witchcraft accusations directed particularly at elderly women.[139] As described by Bishop Crowther in the *Missionary Papers* of 1876, a practice at Osamare placed aged women at extreme risk: once accused, regardless of social status, "whether the mother or wife of a king, or of a rich or poor person, when once accused of witchcraft by any of the priests from the interior Ibo country, the poor, unfortunate, innocent old woman thus accused must prepare to die."[140] The accused was compelled to undergo an ordeal involving the drinking of poisonous water, a test that proved fatal in most cases. This was a specific instance involving the aged mother of Prince Olodi, "who and his

[137] "Gleanings from Recent Letters. "The Gospel preached by a Captive Yoruba Girl," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 32–33.
[138] "Ibadan - its churches and its church," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 136.
[139] By this time, Egungun and Oro increased their role in prosecuting and executing "witches," especially in southwestern towns where these male-led, politico-religious cults held greater political influence. Focusing on elements that regulate and subordinate women, Shields notes that Oro officials not only identified and detained women suspected of witchcraft but also leveraged their authority to reinforce control and financially exploit these women. Francine Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women in an Era of Economic and Social Transition in 19th Century Yorubaland (South-Western Nigeria)" (Ph.D. diss. University of Stirling, 1997), 284.
[140] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 242, 1876, 3–4.

mother were regular attendants at the place of worship every Lord's Day, also with his aged father, the Akako (king),"[141] who was subjected to such an accusation. A similar charge was brought against the sister of Odogu, a war chief, although in this case she was protected by her brother, who openly defied attempts to harm her.

Similar incidents occurred in Abeokuta, where a woman who had formerly been a priestess converted to Christianity, along with her married daughter. When a family member praised the power of Ifa at a gathering, "…the younger of these two women was present and expressed her disbelief in the power of Ifa. A threat was uttered against her."[142] Shortly afterward, she was poisoned and died rapidly. Her fourteen-year-old daughter was likewise poisoned and died within days. The girl's grandmother and another woman residing in the same house were ordered to leave and compelled to obey. When the chiefs were informed, they ordered the women to be allowed back and decreed that no Christian should be persecuted for their faith.[143] These events underscored the particular vulnerability of women, both elderly and young, within familial and communal systems of authority, and the extent to which social networks could determine outcomes in cases of religious conflict.

Alongside these forms of persecution rooted in local belief systems, other cases demonstrated how women were also entangled in practices of warfare and enslavement. The account "A Palaver in the Yoruba Country" recounted the story of two young non-Christian women who were kidnapped in the vicinity of Ibadan, near the area where missionary workers

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[141] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 242, 1876, 4.
[142] Church Missionary Society. *Proceedings* of the Church Missionary Society 1886-1887 (Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square), 22.
[143] Church Missionary Society. *Proceedings* of the Church Missionary Society 1886-1887 (Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square), 22. In the same year, another case was reported by Bishop Crowther in Niger, where about 27 adults were baptized and 64 confirmed their faith. A group of five "were women, some of whom in the days of persecution had been put into a canoe and paddled into the river, and left there helpless, to be tossed up and down by the surging waves in order to frighten them to relapse. Others were sent to the farms of influential chiefs, and put in irons," according to the *Proceedings*, 1887, 29.

under the direction of Bishop Hinderer were engaged in church construction.[144] Following their disappearance, a Babalawo accused the Christians of abducting them, and the matter was brought before a war chief. The judicial process that followed involved the examination of testimonies and consultation with elders, ultimately leading to a verdict declaring the accused innocent and attributing the kidnapping to external abductors. The chief's subsequent speech revealed deeper tensions between missionary teachings and local practices: "I pity our white friend here; he preaches well, indeed, but not to our liking… he tells us we must not go to war, we must not steal and sell each other…we warriors not like it, and the consequence is that he does not get many converts…"[145] The case was subsequently resolved when it was confirmed that the girls had been taken by kidnappers from Abeokuta and later redeemed. The episode illustrated the fragile position of women and girls in conflict zones where kidnapping and enslavement remained common, and the extent to which the rejection of missionary teachings was itself a reasoned response to the incompatibility of Christian prohibitions with the social and economic realities of warfare. Additionally, it emphasizes the vulnerable status of individuals, especially women and girls, within these intertwined systems of authority, work, and violence.

The vulnerability of women within ritual systems was further illustrated by a case reported in the *Intelligencer* by Rev. J. Vernall, Secretary at Lagos, concerning the revival of human sacrifice on the death of a head chief at Ode Ondo on 30 July. The ritual was performed in honour of the deceased chief Basere, despite his prior opposition to the practice, and was conducted in secrecy at night. Unlike earlier practices, victims, including both a male and a female, were neither publicly displayed nor tied to posts, but killed privately in darkness. This event marked a potential revival of human sacrifice previously thought to be declining, in part

[144] "A 'Palaver' in the Yoruba Country," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1874, 102–104.
[145] "A 'Palaver' in the Yoruba Country," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1874, 104.

due to missionary intervention that had helped prevent larger-scale killings.[146] As Ojo has noted, sacrifices were made to appease the gods, ward off illness, and provide workers for elite citizens in the afterlife; in practice, slave selection for sacrifice was based on factors including criminal record, sex, age, and the slaveholder's personal preferences. More sacrifices were performed during celebrations of elite wealth, such as royal funerals, than for the gods themselves.[147] In Ondo, women were among the primary targets: "slave wives and females categorized as 'special' were often reserved for sacrifice, and slave owners were not prevented from selling such slaves for the purpose of sacrifice."[148] The unnamed female victim at Ode Ondo thus exemplified the ongoing vulnerability of women within ritual systems, particularly during political transitions when such practices persisted despite both internal opposition and external missionary pressure.

In contrast to accounts of accusation, abduction, and sacrifice, other cases highlighted confrontations in which women actively defended missionaries or Christian practices. Rev. Beale

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[146] "The Mission Field West Africa," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1893, 914. According to Ojo, in 1877 human sacrifice was increasingly conducted secretly. Victims were no longer displayed publicly; most killings occurred in private, and the number of victims decreased. Although data before 1875 are limited, records from after 1876 show a steady decline in human sacrifice. The CMS campaign against Orisa documented and condemned cases of human sacrifice. Missionaries in Ondo reported sacrifices to Lagos and warned communities about enforced abolition, even threatening military action. By the 1880s, Ondo Christians were viewed as British moles, prompting sacrifices to be concealed from clerics who warned against informing Lagos if leaks occurred. Additionally, missionaries' ties to Lagos's political and commercial sectors expanded, facilitating the development of trader networks and alliances that threatened to withdraw support to influence local loyalty. Olatunji Ojo, "Slavery and Human Sacrifice in Yorubaland: Ondo, c. 1870–94," *Journal of African History*, no. 46 (2005), 397, 399.
Regarding this discussion, Ojo, Isichei, and Law agree that protests by potential victims, Christian missionaries, and interventionist colonial governments played a key role in ending human sacrifice. Elizabeth Isichei, while acknowledging the influence of Euro-Christian pressures, argues that early reform efforts mainly originated in local initiatives by certain African chieftains. Law recognizes these grassroots efforts but emphasizes the need to understand their goals and the extent of external support. He explains that local resistance, particularly among slaves, often aimed to reduce the cruelty and frequency of sacrifices rather than achieve complete abolition. Additionally, Law highlights the significance of Islam, integration into Atlantic trade, and interactions among abolitionist movements. For example, he shows that human sacrifice persisted longer in non-Muslim societies and in states closely connected to Atlantic slavery than in Islamic-influenced areas with less involvement in Atlantic commerce. Ojo, "Slavery and Human Sacrifice," 395; Elizabeth Isichei, "The quest for social reform in the context of traditional religion: a neglected theme of West African History," *African Affairs*, no. 77 (1978), 470; Robin Law, "Human sacrifice in pre-colonial West Africa," *African Affairs*, no. 84 (1985), 62, 78.
[147] Ojo, "Slavery and Human Sacrifice," 379–380. Robin Law, "Human sacrifice in pre-colonial West Africa," *African Affairs,* 84 (1985), 53–87. John D. Y. Peel*, Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, 2001), 69–71.
[148] Ojo, "Slavery and Human Sacrifice," 392.

recounted an incident in Freetown on 9 June 1852, in which a group of non-Christians approached the mission premises to perform a ritual: "an egugu, or Aku (yoruba) devil, with a party of heathen, came from the place mentioned on the 28th. ult. and went drumming and dancing by my church, and in front of my house."[149] Amid the ensuing tension, a "powerful woman," identified as a member of the church, intervened decisively, warning that the missionary was in danger and physically restraining the group's leader. Her actions disrupted the immediate threat and demonstrated the active role women could assume in defending Christian spaces and personnel.[150]

This episode was further connected to the case of Mary C., also recorded in the *Missionary Papers*,[151] whose conversion is directly linked to the same incident. Described as a long-standing practitioner of "superstition and idolatry," who had resisted Christian teachings for over thirty years despite earlier exposure to missionary education in Liberated African schools, where she had learned to read. Her eventual acceptance of Christianity following the confrontation was framed as follows: "Mary was the first-fruits of the movement which commenced with Mr. Beale's seizing the man as above described."[152] The case suggested that episodes of conflict could also serve as catalysts for conversion, and that the boundaries between resistance and religious change were neither fixed nor predictable.

A final illustrative case was recorded by Thomas B. Wright in his Lagos journal on 19 December 1867, concerning the mother of Sopona. An elderly woman and former priestess who had long worshipped a large collection of orisas, some of which she had transmitted to others, she brought her wooden images to the missionary after her son, formerly a soldier of the King of

[149] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 151, 1853, 2.
[150] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 151, 1853.
[151] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 151, 1853, 3-4.
[152] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 151, 1853, 3.

Dahomey, had begun attending baptism classes.[153] Following regular visits to her home by Mr. Lamb and Wright, in which they shared Christian teachings and encouraged her to follow her son's example, she relinquished her religious objects and embraced Christianity.[154] Her case illustrated how conversion could move through familial networks across generations, and how the persistence of missionary engagement, conducted through repeated personal visits rather than formal institutional channels, could gradually reshape individual religious commitments.

Taken together, these cases demonstrated that persecution and violence were integral to broader systems of belief, authority, and social structure rather than exceptional or isolated occurrences. Women appeared in the missionary record as both victims, facing accusations, abduction, coercion, and sacrifice, and as active participants in resistance, negotiation, and religious change. Persecution operated at multiple levels simultaneously: from institutional mechanisms such as Oro to domestic violence, communal sanction, and the entanglement of religious conflict with warfare and enslavement. Nonetheless, these accounts also documented women's resilience and agency, their capacity to navigate, and sometimes to influence, the contested religious landscape of nineteenth-century Yorubaland. Read critically, and against the grain of the missionary sources that preserved them, these stories offer partial but significant evidence of lives shaped by extraordinary pressures and, in many cases, by extraordinary determination.

D. From slavery to conversion: life stories of women in the Missions

The ten case studies presented below traced the paths taken by women in their pursuit of freedom and, in some instances, the events they navigated in order to reunite with their families.

[153] The Journal of Thomas B. Wright, Sunday, December 19th, 1867.
[154] The Journal of Thomas B. Wright, Sunday, December 19th, 1867.

These women represented a range of experiences lived by both girls and adult women across different locations and decades. Their stories illustrated how political instability, warfare, abductions, and forced displacement shaped women's trajectories, and how subsequent conversion to Christianity, whether arrived at through coercion, conviction, or a combination of both, altered not only their religious practices but also their social lives and community relationships. As noted earlier in this chapter, enslaved individuals intercepted at sea were in some cases liberated in Sierra Leone, while others were born in villages surrounding Freetown to parents identified as "Liberated Africans," and later travelled as missionaries or catechists to the Yoruba Mission fields. Each case thus revealed a distinct trajectory of displacement and the varied circumstances that underpinned it.

These life stories were recovered from sources that were themselves shaped by specific institutional purposes and narrative conventions. Missionaries and catechists recorded these women's experiences in diaries, letters, and reports that were subsequently selected and published in CMS newspapers and special bulletins for metropolitan audiences. As a result, what has been preserved reflects not only the women's own trajectories but also the priorities and interpretive frameworks of those who documented them. Read with this in mind, the cases nonetheless offered significant, if partial, evidence of the ways in which women negotiated the overlapping pressures of enslavement, displacement, family separation, and religious transformation in nineteenth-century West Africa.

a. *"Liberated African woman," slavery and conversion*

Case 1. "A Liberated African," a Moko woman

As noted earlier, Freetown had become a refuge for individuals liberated at sea, for whom accounting records existed.[155] In other instances, however, there are also narratives dictated by the women themselves and recorded by missionaries and catechists in their diaries or letters, some of which were later selected and published in CMS newspapers or special bulletins.

This was the case of an anonymous woman identified as part of the group known as "Liberated Africans." Her story appeared in a note published in the *Church Missionary Gleaner* in 1844, entitled "A Liberated African's Account of Her Capture." She identified herself as Moko, an Ibibio speaker, originating from the Bight of Biafra region. According to Northrup, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Moko were Ibibio-speaking peoples, probably associated with the Anang,[156] from geographical areas close to the Igbo and Calabar regions. Like other terms such as Aku or Calabar, Moko was not a label by which people self-identified prior to arriving in Sierra Leone; rather, depending on the Atlantic context in which they found themselves, references to their origins varied between Calabar, Cameroon, and Gabon.[157] She was not alone in this identification: according to the 1848 Sierra Leone census, 470 individuals identified as Moko,[158] and even today, there is a village called Moko located in southern Sierra Leone.

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[155] Digital repository *Liberated Africans*, www.liberatedafricans.org
[156] David Northrup, "New Light from Old Sources: Pre-colonial References to the Anang Ibibio," *Ikenga Journal of African Studies,* 2, no. 1 (1973), 4.
[157] Richard Anderson, *Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (African Identities: Past and Present. Cambridge University Press, 2020), 145–148. See Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "Anglo–Efik Relations and Protection against Illegal Enslavement at Old Calabar, 1740–1807," in *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies*, ed. Sylviane Diouf (Ohio University Press, 2003), 103–104.
[158] Richard Anderson, "Appendices." App-group, in *Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (African Identities: Past and Present. Cambridge University Press, 2020), 267–275.

In 1843, this woman identified herself as a devout Christian, according to her life history, which she shared with the African catechist M. T. Harding, with whom she resided in the same village in Freetown. The information recorded briefly recounted the circumstances of her capture and liberation from slavery and how she had lost her family in the process.

Part of the narrative stated that her father had died when she was twelve years old, and she was the youngest of five siblings. Following his death, two brothers and two sisters were captured as a result of the war ravaging the Biafran region. She fled with her mother and one brother "to the country of their relations," where they remained together for three years. However, war once again reached them, and her brother was captured. On this occasion, she and her mother hid in the bushes until they too were captured and taken to a camp, where her mother was killed before her eyes. The terror of what she had witnessed caused her to lose hope of living, "…but she said the mercy of God preserved her, and through that mercy she was brought to this land of peace."[159]

In this woman's case, it was evident that she not only faced the terror of war as a child, but also endured capture, the death of her parents and siblings, and forced displacement to a land far from her home. Although it was not possible to identify the internal routes she had followed prior to embarkation, her origin was known from her identification as a "Female of the Moko Tribe." Once "liberated" and taken to Sierra Leone, she converted to Christianity as an adult rather than as a child. She concluded her account by stating that it was God who had saved her and had brought her to a land of peace.

Due to the wars in the region and the forced displacement of those attempting to flee, it was possible that she had found herself in a vulnerable situation in which she was captured and

[159] "A Liberated African's account of her capture," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1844, 134–135.

placed aboard a slave ship bound for the Americas. During the voyage, the vessel was intercepted by the British navy, which ultimately brought her to Freetown. Her Christian faith likely developed in this new settlement, where she had to reconstruct bonds of solidarity lost during the violent course of her life.

Just as many families had been destroyed by the slave trade and war, as in the previous cases discussed at the beginning of the chapter, there were also family members who were reunited despite the difficulties endured in bringing about such reunions. Similarly, while for some women conversion to Christianity represented salvation, for others conversion also implied renouncing their cultural identity and religious beliefs, often under pressure or at the request of their children. The following example illustrates both situations.

Case 2. "Put aside the country fashion": the implications of conversion

Family reunions were rare, precisely because families were separated, some members died, and others were taught along different routes. However, when relatives were sold and relocated to nearby regions, they were more likely to encounter one another again. Nevertheless, when they were embarked and transported to Sierra Leone, the colony's large size and the sheer number of displaced people made reunions highly unlikely.

According to the Reverend C. T. Grey, in October 1843, twenty-six adults were baptized in one of Sierra Leone's villages, among them a twenty-two-year-old young man and his mother, an elderly woman. Both originated in the Yoruba country and were separated after being sold to different owners. Subsequently transported on separate ships to Sierra Leone, they were intercepted by "Her Majesty's cruisers." After living for several years in the same colony

without knowing it, the young man and his mother were finally reunited: "They providentially met with each other."

No further details were provided, as the emphasis of this account lay in the fact that the son had succeeded in persuading his mother to convert to Christianity and to abandon the customs of her homeland in order to accompany him to church: "…put aside 'country-fashion' and to accompany him to our church…" The note reporting this case highlighted that after the young man's baptism into the Christian faith, he received instruction in reading and devoted himself to studying the Bible.[160] It also emphasized that although mother and son had been separated by slavery, they had managed to reunite in a distant land, now together "…in the bonds of the Gospel."[161]

Her origin from the Yoruba country did not allow us to identify her specific place of origin, since no region named Yoruba existed in the nineteenth century, as shown in Map 3.2. However, according to the 1848 Sierra Leone census, approximately 7,114 individuals identified as Akoo/Aku, today recognized as Yoruba from southwestern Nigeria.[162]

During this period, the various displacements individuals had suffered as a result of political and economic developments in their regions of origin became evident. As seen in the preceding cases, one woman was relocated to Sierra Leone, where she reunited with her son, while another had learned of her son's abduction in Abeokuta. These life stories reflected the internal conflicts women experienced during what has been described as the "era of confusion," as illustrated in the following case.

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[160] "Unexpected meeting of a mother and son in Sierra Leone, and its happy results," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* IV, 1844, 135–136.
[161] "Unexpected meeting of a mother and son in Sierra Leone, and its happy results," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* IV, 1844, 135–136.
[162] Anderson, "Appendices," 267–275.

b. ***Motherhood, conversion and family reunion***

Case 3. Elizabeth: "The struggle between good and evil."

For adult women, conversion entailed not only a change of religion but also the abandonment of cultural beliefs, whether by recommendation or pressure from their children. This was the case of Elizabeth, who, unlike the woman in Case 2, accepted conversion in order to reunite with her son "in the hereafter."

Her son, John Baptist Dasalu, had been abducted and was for some time believed to have died in battle, although it was later discovered that he was a prisoner of the king of Dahomey, who repeatedly threatened Abeokuta throughout the nineteenth century. In her anguish and uncertainty, she decided to convert to Christianity, as her son, already a believer, had repeatedly urged her to do so. Because her son had not returned, no ransom had been demanded, and she had recently suffered a severe illness during which she nearly died, this elderly woman ultimately decided to convert. In other words, the fear of dying without seeing her son again, despite her previous resistance to conversion, led her to consent. After this change of heart, the missionary Barber visited her regularly to ensure that she did not retract her decision and that the conversion process was completed.

Her reason for conversion was explicit in her statement: if she could not reunite with her son in this life, at least she would be able to do so after death. "If I die a heathen, and in my sin, we might not meet again, because my son used to say there will be a separation between the evil and the Good after death."[163]

This story was published by the Reverend Crowther in the *Gleaner* in 1853, where it was reported that this mother's instruction had been entrusted to Eve, another adult woman and the

[163] "Abbeokuta, and it's converts," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1853, 75.

eldest member of the Christian community in Abeokuta. Eve also served as her witness and counsellor, which Crowther considered fundamental to her conversion. Unlike in the previous cases, she was baptized on October 31, 1852, taking the name Elizabeth. Unfortunately, the records had not preserved her name prior to conversion. Her case highlighted the importance of women such as Eve in the process of adopting the Christian faith, as they played a crucial role not only in instructing girls who attended schools but also in serving as networks of women and assistants in the missions, accompanying others through conversion, illness, and even on their deathbeds.

Case 4. Hannah Afala: "a true Yoruba woman."

The nineteenth century was a turbulent period marked by constant political reorganization. Entire communities were devastated, and families were separated by frequent raids in the interior. By mid-century, many individuals were captured and resold in coastal markets. This was the case of the family of Samuel Crowther and his mother, Afala.

Afala was captured in her hometown of Oshogun in 1821 along with her three children. Her husband failed to escape and was killed by Muslim slave raiders. Afala was captured multiple times during those years, but she was never taken overseas; instead, she was moved through different towns in what is now southern Nigeria. She was first pawned, and one of her daughters and her grandson redeemed the debt. However, she was captured again and taken to several locations before arriving in Ibadan as a domestic servant. There she was sold and taken to market, from where she was sent to Abeokuta. She remained enslaved there for five years, until her daughters purchased her freedom and she settled in Abaka.

Among her children was Adjai Crowther, who at only twelve years of age was separated from his family and sold to Portuguese traders. The following year, he was embarked in Eko (present-day Lagos) but was rescued by the H.M.S. Myrmidon and taken to Sierra Leone, where he received Christian instruction and missionary training. As a member of the CMS, he joined the Yoruba Mission led by the Reverend H. Townsend. After twenty-four years, he reunited with his mother and two sisters in Abeokuta, only weeks after arriving there as a missionary.

Afala was baptized in Abeokuta on 6 February 1848, by the Reverend H. Townsend, becoming one of the first individuals baptized in this new mission, where she received the name Hannah. In the same ceremony, five adults, "the first-fruits of the Mission," were baptized on that day.[164] She lived to nearly one hundred years of age and never adopted European customs, not even in dress. According to the *Gleaner*, "she liked to sit on a little stall in the Lagos market like a true Yoruba woman."[165] The portrait published in the *Church Missionary Gleaner* in 1884 depicts Hannah Afala at approximately ninety-five or ninety-six years of age. She died in 1883.

Regarding their reunion, Crowther wrote in his personal diary: "When she saw me, she trembled. She could scarcely believe what she saw. We embraced each other, looking at one another in silence and great amazement; big tears rolled down her emancipated cheeks."[166] This event was reported in various newspapers and journals, as well as in letters sent by Townsend and Crowther to CMS headquarters.

Several generations of this family had been enslaved: Crowther's grandmother died without being liberated; Hannah and her two daughters were captured together but later managed to purchase their freedom. All were displaced within the same region, which facilitated their

[164] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 137, 1850, 4.
[165] "Death of Bishop Crowther's Mother," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1884, 11.
[166] "Death of Bishop Crowther's Mother," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1884, 11.

reunion. In the case of her son Adjai, however, reunification initially failed because he was taken to Freetown, as were so many others. Years later, he returned with his wife and children as part of the CMS system.

In Crowther's case, it is evident that members of the missionary society had to move to other regions to continue their work. He returned to his place of origin as a missionary, which enabled him to reunite with his mother and sisters and to rise to prominence within the Yoruba and Niger missions.

Case 5. Joanna Ebiba: delayed reunion and late-life conversion

The prolonged conflicts that intensified after 1852 between Ibadan and Abeokuta formed a crucial backdrop for understanding delayed conversion and disrupted mobility in the region. By the 1870s, continued warfare, including blockades and shifting political control, significantly constrained movement between towns, often preventing individuals from returning to their places of origin or completing their journeys. This context is evident in the case of Joanna Ebiba, an elderly woman whose trajectory reflects the long-term consequences of these disruptions. Her delayed conversion and long familial separation appeared in a letter by Daniel Olubi, an African minister in Ibadan, published in the *Gleaner* in 1874 under the title "The Baptism and Death of an aged Yoruba woman." The letter opened with the announcement: "My dear aunt Joanna Ebiba gently sleeps today (…) after a long illness of six months."[167]

Following Olubi's conversion in 1852, his aunt developed an interest in Christianity and intended to be baptized. She set out from Abeokuta to Ibadan with this purpose, but her journey was interrupted when she stopped in Ijaye upon learning of her brother's illness. There, she

[167] "Gleanings from Recent Letters. Baptism and Death of an aged Yoruba Woman," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1874, 77.

remained and eventually became a resident of Efan country, unable to return due to a blockade that restricted movement across the region.

As a result of this prolonged separation, her nephew came to believe that she had died, but she was 'eleven days' distance from Ibadan'. Only after "eighteen long years' separation" were they reunited. Upon their reunion, she affirmed her religious commitment, declaring herself "to be a worshipper of God after the way of the Oibo religion (i.e. Christianity)."[168] She was ultimately baptized at the age of ninety by Olubi himself, who by then had become a deacon.

This case underscores how warfare and regional instability not only fragmented families but also deferred religious conversion, situating both processes within extended temporal frameworks marked by displacement, uncertainty, and eventual reunion.

c. *Communicants: Unrecognized African missionaries*

Case 6. Mrs. White of Otta: "Mother of all, a public loss."

As illustrated below, the case of the White family differs in that they were born in Sierra Leone as children of "Liberated Africans" and later travelled to Otta as CMS emissaries. Years later, at the request of Bishop Crowther, Mr. J. White wrote in the *Gleaner* of 1867 to report the death of his wife, Mrs. White of Otta, through which her story became known.

Mrs. White was born in 1825 in Gloucester (Sierra Leone), where she attended the local school. She died on April 29, 1867, in Otta, a town near Lagos. In 1849, the government appointed her headmistress of the school for "Liberated African" children in Charlotte, where she met the Reverend White. When he was assigned to the Yoruba Mission, he proposed marriage so that she might accompany him in spreading the gospel. Difficulties arose from their

[168] "Gleanings from Recent Letters. Baptism and Death of an aged Yoruba Woman," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1874, 77.

family backgrounds, as her parents were Igbo and Mr. White's were Yoruba. Although the narrative does not detail the rivalries involved, it notes that tensions arose within their families.

As the eldest of seven siblings, she first spoke with her mother and requested her consent to offer herself in sacrifice to God and to missionary work alongside J. White, believing that this would secure her father's acceptance. This illustrated the importance of parental consent for marriage, as well as the crucial role of maternal support in a matrifocal society. They married in 1850 and departed for the Yoruba Mission, specifically to the town of Otta, where they worked together in missionary activities for many years. In 1856, they had their first daughter.

Mrs. White died weeks after giving birth to her second daughter, who also died two months later due to poor health. According to the Reverend White, her death was "a public loss to the whole town of Otta," affecting not only her family but also the Church and all who knew her, as she was regarded as a mother by many, including non-believers. She was known for helping all women in need. Her husband described her as a missionary at heart, a deeply devout woman, visited by many who prayed with her at her deathbed. She especially requested the presence of Sarah, who was responsible for female conversions, and reproached her for not bringing the women to pray with her. She then urged them to take good care of God's work.[169]

Mrs. White was remembered as kind to everyone around her, regardless of origin or religion. For this reason, when she died, the chiefs of Otta came forward with Croydon cloth for her funeral. She was accompanied by both believers and non-believers, who expressed their grief as follows: "The female converts threw into her coffin each a white handkerchief; whilst the heathen women, knowing no other way of testifying their sorrows, made loud lamentations by

[169] "Wife of the Rev. J. "White, Native Minister at Otta, near Lagos. Communicated by her Husband," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 100-101.

her corpse; some showing their feet, and others their clothes, for the use of which they acknowledged that they were indebted to her."[170]

The missions in the communities surrounding Lagos had not succeeded in converting large numbers of inhabitants and remained in constant dialogue with non-believers. However, Mrs. White had managed to draw closer to many of them without pressuring them to convert, which explained the presence of these women at her funeral.

Caso 7: Maria Ekidan, 'Mammy Oniwasu', 'mammy the preacher'

Another illustrative case of women's religious lives and social roles within missionary communities was that of Maria Ekidan, also known as 'Maria Elese' and 'Omo Alanu,' an Egba woman whose life and death were recorded in a lengthy missionary report. Identified as an adult woman and remembered as a devoted Christian sister, her case offered insight into the intersections of gender, conversion, and everyday religious practice in nineteenth-century Yorubaland. Her experience also provided a compelling example of how African women operated as what may be termed unrecognized missionaries, figures who, although not formally designated as evangelists, played a central role in the dissemination and consolidation of Christianity within local societies.

Maria Ekidan was an Egba convert associated with the ministry of the late Rev. Thomas King at Abeokuta. She arrived in the community prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1867 and, despite making occasional visits to her relatives, consistently returned, suggesting a deliberate commitment to remain within the Christian settlement for the remainder of her life. The multiple names by which she was known reflected both her moral transformation and her standing within

[170] "Wife of the Rev. J. White, "Native Minister at Otta, near Lagos. Communicated by her Husband," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 104.

the community. 'Maria Elese,' meaning 'Maria the sinner,' emphasized her past and the narrative of redemption central to missionary discourse, while 'Omo Alanu,' meaning 'child of the merciful,'[171] underscored her identification with Christian ideals, an expression of belonging she reportedly extended to all believers. Together, these names illustrated how conversion reshaped not only religious identity but also social recognition within the mission community.

Within the mission community, Maria lived as a petty trader, yet her social significance extended far beyond her economic role. She was widely regarded as a moral exemplar, embodying the ideal of diligence and religious devotion. The missionary account described her as a source of 'wise counsel' in resolving disputes among converts and as a firm reprover of sin, committed to truth and holiness. Her daily activities as a trader facilitated a broader evangelical presence: moving throughout Badagry, she engaged diverse populations across social and religious boundaries, "…whilst she travelled about to sell, she went from house to house, so that in the heart and outskirts of the town."[172] In this capacity, she became widely known not simply as a trader but as 'Mammy Oniwasu' (mammy the preacher), reflecting her active role in disseminating Christian teachings among "rich and poor, old and young, male and female, heathens and Mahommedans."[173]

Her death further reinforced her status within the community. After a brief illness, reportedly preceded by an earache, Maria Ekidan died on Sunday night, 16 November 1873, on the third day of her sickness. She was buried in the Christian burial ground, and her passing elicited expressions of grief not only from Christians but also from Muslims and non-Christians, suggesting the breadth of her social and moral influence. As recorded by Rev. Samuel Pearce, an

[171] "Sick and dying Christians in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 37-38.
[172] "Sick and dying Christians in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 37-38.
[173] "Sick and dying Christians in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 37-38.

African pastor at Badagry, this account preserved her memory as both a religious convert and a respected community figure and illuminated the broader processes by which African women contributed to the establishment and normalization of Christianity in nineteenth-century Yorubaland.

d. *Persecution of Christians by worshipers?*

Case 8. Abiefu of Oshielle

By 1868, the case of Abiefu of Oshielle, from a town near Abeokuta, presented a more complex dynamic in which conversion arose from a personal crisis and unfolded amid overlapping pressures and negotiations. Abiefu appeared as an adult woman living in a Yoruba compound in Oshielle, where she first encountered Christian missionary activity through the visits of a local pastor, Mr. Moore. After losing her only son and a maid, despite costly sacrifices to Ifa, Abiefu began to doubt the effectiveness of indigenous religious practices.

She had sought help from Ifa, one of the national gods, "the revealer of secrets and the guardian of marriages and childbirth."[174] This god was consulted by means of sixteen palm-nuts, a rite that referred to an old tradition in which sixteen persons founded Yoruba; they had brought with them a palm-nut that produced a tree with sixteen branches, and such a tree, with so many branches, grew in Mount Ado, where the chief priest of Ifa resided.[175]

Despite these efforts, her son's health continued to deteriorate, and eventually he died. This loss was further intensified by the illness and death of a maidservant she had been very close to, despite her having sought help from Ifa. These events marked a key turning point,

[174] "Abiefu, of Oshielle," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1868, 30.
[175] "Abiefu, of Oshielle," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1868, 29–32.

highlighting the failure of traditional religious systems to offer relief and the simultaneous exhaustion of her emotional and material resources.

After her interaction with a missionary, she ultimately embraced Christianity. Her repeated attendance at Christian services over multiple Sundays and her desire to join the candidates' class for baptism indicated a conscious move toward Christian faith, described as a pursuit of "light, peace, and hope for the future." Her change of faith, however, triggered immediate resistance from her household, including her daughter, and from broader institutional authorities. She was called before the Ogboni society of Iporo, a significant political-religious group, and asked to participate in a ritual feast, probably as a test of loyalty or punishment. Although this situation risked coercion or violence, Abiefu outwardly complied while maintaining her Christian faith privately.

Abiefu journeyed from Oshielle to Abeokuta under uncertain circumstances, causing concern within the Christian community during her absence. When she returned, it was reported that she remained physically safe and had retained her religious devotion. Her safe return without violence is partly credited to a relative, her nephew, who pleaded for her release before the council, citing her age and history of practicing traditional customs.

Her case showed that persecution and pressure often did not result in outright breaks but instead led to negotiations, partial compromises, and the coexistence of conflicting religious expectations within mission communities. This pattern of family persecution recurred across several stories, underscoring its persistence across regions and over time. Rather than a straightforward break from the past, Abiefu's experience illustrated how conversion might involve managing domestic disputes, institutional authority, and community duties while maintaining a new religious identity.

Case 9: Moyoade, captive Yoruba girl

The narrative of Moyoade, as recorded in the journal of Rev. Daniel Olubi (June 15th, 1874), offered a concise yet revealing account of a female captive in Ibadan, whose life was shaped by coercion, religious conflict, and repeated resistance.

Moyoade was a young Yoruba girl held in captivity under the authority of relatives who controlled her movements and religious choices. She was described as being "in fetters," indicating that she was physically restrained, in a form of punitive or coercive domestic confinement. Christian agents, Olubi, and church members initially intervened to help her, reflecting broader missionary efforts in Ibadan aimed at negotiating her release and allowing her to engage in Christian worship. These negotiations, however, proved unsuccessful, as her relatives remained "obstinate and unreasonable," refusing to allow her to engage in religious activities.[176]

A key stage in her trajectory is marked by escape and her strategic relocation. Moyoade freed herself from her chains and sought protection from the Kakanfo, identified as a Muslim head chief. The movement from her place of confinement to another authority structure signalled both agency and awareness of alternative systems of protection. The chief's response was significant: he not only offered her assistance but also intervened directly by summoning her relatives and instructing them to allow her to pursue her chosen religion, which he described as "the best religion."[177] This episode marked a moment of temporary protection and external arbitration, though it does not result in lasting security.

When she returned to her relatives, Moyoade's condition worsened. Instead of following the chief's orders, her family tightened their control, punishing her more harshly and confining

[176] "Gleanings from Recent Letters," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 32–33.
[177] "Gleanings from Recent Letters," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 32.

her more strictly, as she was described as being "more cruelly chained."[178] This highlighted the limited effect of outside intervention and the enduring influence of her family in controlling her life. When confronted by her relatives, she declared her willingness to obey in all matters except one: "If you will stop my going to church, I prefer death rather than obey you."[179]

In response, Moyoade escaped again, first finding safety at another inquirer's house, then being moved to a new location under missionary care for her protection. These repeated attempts to escape illustrated her ongoing resistance and mobility despite restrictions. The final stage of the account suggested a provisional resolution, as a later report indicated that her case had been "nicely settled" and was "all going on beautifully," though no details were provided about the nature of this settlement. As such, her trajectory remained only partially resolved within the narrative.

Case 10: Afresi, the persecution of the converters

The case of Afresi, documented in *Church Missionary Papers* and later in "Sick and Dying Christians in Yoruba," presented a detailed account of female conversion, persecution, and death within the Yoruba missionary context.[180] Afresi was a woman of Popo origin from Badagry, belonging to a prominent family associated with the maintenance of fetish worship. Within a community that had long resisted Christian influence, her conversion was closely linked to her husband, who encouraged her to attend Christian worship.

Her decision provoked strong opposition from her relatives, particularly her brother, who was actively involved in local religious practices. He forcibly removed her to the fetish house,

[178] "Gleanings from Recent Letters," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 33.
[179] "Gleanings from Recent Letters," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 33.
[180] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. 222, 1871, 1-4. "Sick and Dying Christians in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 37–38.

subjected her to physical violence, and threatened her with death should she persist in attending church. As a result, Afresi temporarily withdrew from Christian worship. Shortly thereafter, her brother fell seriously ill and died despite ritual sacrifices, after which she resumed her Christian practice. When further complaints were raised by fetish devotees, her father defended her and allowed her to continue.

Afresi subsequently sought admission to the baptismal class and publicly renounced her former religious practices. Her husband also pursued baptism but was required to regularize his domestic situation through Christian marriage. Following the instruction, he was baptized as Job Odemogun, and their marriage was celebrated on 27 June in Badagry, attracting considerable public attention. Despite this, hostility toward Afresi persisted, and she continued to face social rejection from members of her community.

In early October, Afresi became seriously ill, suffering from fever, convulsions, and delirium. Although medical assistance was considered, her condition worsened, and she remained confined. During this period, she rejected traditional remedies and relied on prayer. When urged by her father to return to customary practices, she refused, maintaining her Christian profession. She was eventually baptized as Sarah shortly before her death.

Rev. Samuel Pearce, Native Pastor at Badagry wrote:

> On the 7th May also our ranks became thinner by the removal from this scene of troubles of our dear old Eliza Afresi, the old Popo convert. For some four or five months before this event she became quite disabled by weakness, and subsequently was blind from extreme age. All her heathen relations had forsaken her, because she could not have been so old as to survive her generation unless she was a witch. And since she embraced Christianity she became more hateful to them to that extent that many of the Popo fetish devotees would not meet her by the way without spitting at her. During her confinement in a room, Paul Akibode, her landlord, with his wife and household, took the greatest possible care of her, and never suffered her to want.[181]

[181] "Sick and Dying Christians in Yoruba," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1875, 37–38.

Afresi died after a period of illness, and her burial was attended by members of the Christian community. According to Rev. Samuel Pearce, she was remembered as one of the "sick and dying Christians in Yoruba," whose final days were marked by steadfast adherence to her adopted faith. At the same time, reactions within the wider community remained divided, reflecting the tensions surrounding conversion and religious change in Badagry.

As the case studies in this chapter demonstrated, slavery was a complex, multi-phase process that shaped a person's entire life rather than a singular event. Women's experiences extended well beyond the moment of initial capture to encompass successive stages of displacement, sale, domestic integration, and, in some instances, redemption and religious conversion. The analysis underscored the gendered specificity of these experiences, particularly the disruption of kinship ties. The frequent separation of mothers and children illustrated that slavery involved not only the exploitation of labour but also the systematic fragmentation of social and affective bonds. The reconstitution of those bonds, where it occurred, was itself a contingent and negotiated process dependent on financial resources, social networks, and institutional mediation.

Missionary settings introduced new organizational structures and created spaces of belonging for women who had been violently displaced from their communities of origin. Missions across Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, and along the Niger served as both zones of disruption and renewal. Women entered these environments through multiple pathways, including as "Liberated Africans" resettling in Sierra Leone, as escapees seeking refuge, and as individuals actively pursuing education and conversion. They played central roles in forming the new social networks that sustained and expanded missionary communities. These roles were not secondary to mission life but constitutive of it.

Education occupied a dual and often contradictory place within these processes, promoting British disciplinary ideals and missionary values while simultaneously equipping women with practical skills for social and economic participation. Literacy, religious instruction, and vocational training created opportunities in teaching, trade, and community leadership, illustrating how missionary initiatives could function as both instruments of control and spaces of possibility, often at the same time. Conversion, similarly, was best understood not as a singular moment of transformation but as a relational and negotiated process embedded within kinship networks. Women frequently acted as mediators of religious change, influencing family members and sustaining Christian practices within domestic settings. Intergenerational exchanges, such as children encouraging mothers to convert and elderly women serving as instructors and witnesses for younger converts, demonstrated how religious ideas circulated within family groups across time and space. In these contexts, and as the life stories have shown, women played active roles as wives, daughters, mothers, schoolteachers, students, catechists, and communicants, making vital contributions to the daily operations and growth of missionary work. These roles were central, not secondary to mission life. Education held a dual and often conflicting importance, promoting British disciplinary ideals aligned with missionary values while also equipping women with skills for social and economic participation. Literacy, religious instruction, and technical training created opportunities in teaching, trade, and other fields, illustrating how missionary initiatives could be both restrictive and empowering. Conversion should be viewed as a relational and negotiated process within kinship networks. Women frequently acted as mediators of religious change, influencing family members and sustaining Christian customs at home. But also, intergenerational exchanges, such as children encouraging their mothers to convert, demonstrate how religious ideas circulated within family groups.

At the same time, the stories collected here also illustrate the limits of what the missionary archive could preserve. Women appear in these sources primarily at moments that served the missionaries' narrative purposes: arrival, baptism, illness, death. The texture of their daily lives, their own interpretations of their experiences, and the full complexity of their relationships remain largely beyond the reach of the record. Read critically, and against the grain of the sources that preserved them, these last ten life stories offer significant evidence of women's resilience, agency, and centrality to the religious and social transformations of nineteenth-century Yorubaland, transformations that African and European missionary narratives documented yet that African woman themselves helped shape.

CHAPTER 5. WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE CMS PUBLICATIONS, 1840-1890

During the nineteenth century, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) circulated a range of publications intended to inform readers about its overseas missions. These publications reported on missionary activities through extracts from missionaries' journals, correspondence, and official reports, while also highlighting specific aspects of the regions in which mission stations were established. Narratives were frequently accompanied by images depicting urban and rural landscapes, architectural features, traditional customs, scenes of daily life, and portraits of missionaries, their families, and other CMS workers. Although each publication addressed a particular audience and changed through time, their shared objective was to communicate the nature and significance of the CMS's work beyond England.

This chapter examines representations of women in four CMS publications: *The Church Missionary Papers*, The *Gleaner*, *The Intelligencer*, and *The Pictorial Album*. Not all CMS publications circulated consistently throughout the period under study; for this reason, the analysis focuses on these four titles rather than a single periodical. The principal aim is to identify how women were portrayed in these publications and to assess whether, and to what extent, they were included at all. The chapter further compares textual and visual representations to address several related questions: how frequently were images published, what purposes did these images serve, how often did publications address women explicitly, and were women discussed with the same frequency as they were visually represented? Finally, the chapter explores the differences between textual and visual portrayals of women within CMS publications. Through this analysis, the chapter seeks to interpret the role assigned to women within the CMS's public discourse during the mid- to late nineteenth century.

A. About the CMS publications:

The four selected periodicals differed somewhat in format, length, and intended audience; however, they shared a common characteristic: their consistent use of visual material. All incorporated images, whether based on drawings or sketches produced by missionaries, engraved illustrations, or, by the end of the nineteenth century, photographs. CMS publications frequently used illustrations to depict episodes described in the diaries and reports of European and West African missionaries. This practice can be observed in early publications such as the *Missionary Papers*. In other cases, however, the use of images developed unevenly. *The Missionary Gleaner*, for example, did not include illustrations from its inception, while the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* initially featured images in its early decades but later became a predominantly text-based publication. By contrast, the *Gleaner Pictorial Album* was entirely devoted to visual material drawn from the *Gleaner*, with minimal accompanying text placed alongside the images to explain their content.

Although the subject matter of these publications did not vary, the length of the coverage did, and the missionaries in charge of major stations typically provided regular monthly updates. In many instances, the same events, narratives, and images circulated across multiple periodicals. Significant episodes, such as Rev. Henry Townsend's expedition to Abeokuta, Rev. Samuel Crowther's journey along the Niger River, the deaths of prominent CMS figures, and the political and economic challenges faced by mission stations, were reported across diverse publications. Major regional conflicts, including the Dahomean invasions in the first half of the nineteenth century, were also widely covered. The length and depth of coverage, however, varied depending on the publication's format and target audience.

The Missionary Papers, issued quarterly, were among the earliest CMS publications, dating from 1816, and were intended for weekly and monthly contributors to the Society. This title was used until 1832, after which the publication was renamed *Church Missionary Paper* (for the use of weekly and monthly contributors). It was issued four times a year and identified by both a numerical sequence and seasonal markers (Lady Day, Midsummer, Michaelmas, and Christmas). From 1866 onward, the issues were distinguished by the month names (March, June/July, September/October, and December), along with the publication number and year.

Typically, four pages long, *the Missionary Paper* often featured an engraved image on its cover, though portraits based on photographs or drawings occasionally appeared. The image was explained at the start of the second page and related directly to the narrative that followed. These narratives usually highlighted specific mission activities, recounted events at particular stations, or presented excerpts from missionary correspondence. In some cases, the publication offered broader assessments of conditions in mission fields. The principal objective of the Missionary Papers was "to bring the news of the Church Missionary Society to its readers at home and to raise money for the burgeoning missionary society."[1] Consequently, "only the subscribers or collectors of One Penny a week were entitled to a free copy of this Paper," as stated at the end of each issue.

In 1849, a commemorative volume bringing together thirty-three years of *Missionary Papers* was published for the Society's Jubilee year. Its preface explained that "the Committee adopted the plan of inviting individuals, who were able and willing to undertake the gratuitous office, to collect for this sacred treasury, from their poor neighbours and friends one penny a-week, sixpence a-month or such other small sums as might suit their convenience."[2] The

[1] Adam Matthews site, Periodicals, https://www.churchmissionarysociety.amdigital.co.uk/Introduction/Titles
[2] *Church Missionary Papers,* published for the Society's Jubilee year, 1849, 1.

Missionary Paper was described as employing "plain language," providing "intelligence of the proceedings of the Society," and offering "engraved representations and printed accounts of the ignorance and miseries of the unhappy objects of the kind solicitude." It was further argued that "the well-disposed among the labouring classes would be enabled to aid in the work of evangelizing the world," thereby contributing significantly to the Society's financial resources.[3]

The Missionary Gleaner began as a small paper produced by Rev. Charles Hodgson, one of the Society's Association Secretaries, and later became a two-penny monthly magazine in 1841. Initially, it was a text-only publication, but after 1850, a new, expanded series was introduced, featuring a woodcut illustration on the front page. This format continued until 1870. During this period, the *Gleaner* featured woodcut images intended to document and publicize the Society's activities. Its reports followed a style similar to that of the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, typically presenting a frontispiece image followed by written accounts of missionary findings and activities.[4]

The publication ceased in 1870 and was replaced by the more modern Church Missionary Gleaner, which ran from 1874 to 1914. When Rev. Henry Wright became honorary secretary, he emphasized the need to produce a new, more popular and visually appealing paper. From 1874 onward, the *Gleaner* increased in both length and circulation, expanding to sixteen pages rather than just a few. Reports from various mission fields increasingly included sketches, drawings, and engravings, making the publication more attractive and accessible to a wider audience.[5]

Contemporary with the *Gleaners* of the 1850s was the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, a publication directed at a more scholarly audience. It featured in-depth articles written in a journal

[3] *Church Missionary Papers,* published for the Society's Jubilee year, 1849, 1.
[4] Church Missionary Society*,* "The Society's Periodicals," *The Centenary Volume of the Church Missionary for Africa and the East 1799-1899* (Church Missionary Society, 1902), 592.
[5] Church Missionary Society*,* "The Society's Periodicals," 592.

style and was issued monthly. As *The Society's Periodicals* explains: "Immediately after the Jubilee the committee formed plans for the issue of a superior monthly publication, in which articles on the geography, ethnology, religions, etc. of the various Mission fields could appear; and in which important missionary letters could be published at once, instead of waiting perhaps for some months their turn in the systematic reports given in the C.M. Record."[6]

The *Intelligencer* was derived from the *Church Missionary Record*, which had been published since 1830 and was renamed in 1849. In 1876, the *C.M. Record* was formally united with the *Intelligencer* under the title *Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record*. During the 1890s, the "and Record" was dropped from the title. In 1907, the publication was renamed the *Church Missionary Review*. From 1850 to 1871, the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* was edited by Rev. Joseph Ridgeway, and from 1871 to 1878 by Rev. George Knox.

In addition to these publications, the CMS produced three volumes of the *Gleaner Pictorial Album* between 1887 and 1888. These volumes were conceived as collections intended to teach and explore the visual culture of missionary reporting, with particular emphasis on illustrations drawn from the *Gleaner*. Of the three volumes, only a small number of pages in the first were devoted to West African missions, specifically Sierra Leone, Yoruba regions, and the Niger River, while the remaining content focused on missions in East Africa, New Zealand, India, China, and other regions.

Each mission was introduced through a summary of basic contextual information relevant at the time of publication, accompanied by a sequence of images that varied in period, style, and thematic focus. The albums presented a global overview of missionary activity by depicting the locations of missions and stations, the surrounding landscapes, local populations, and their

[6] Church Missionary Society, "The Society's Periodicals," 593.

customs, along with brief explanatory captions. Through this curated selection of illustrations, the *Gleaner Pictorial Album* served as a visual window into the work of the CMS and the evangelizing mission worldwide.

B. About Best Practices for Collecting Images: Methodological Notes

In order to analyze representations of women in Church Missionary Society (CMS) publications between 1840 and 1890, this study was structured around a two-stage methodological process, each with several sequential steps. The first stage involved the identification, classification, and systematic naming of images, while the second consisted of constructing two databases: one containing all images published in the four selected CMS publications since their inception, and a second database limited to images that included representations of women within the temporal scope of this study.

To understand the purposes of these publications and how their visual content evolved over time, I conducted a comprehensive review of all relevant issues and images from the four publications, focusing on the geographical areas and historical processes under examination. This review encompassed materials related to the early movements and expeditions of returnees and missionaries from Sierra Leone to the Bight of Benin, as well as the subsequent establishment of the Yoruba and Niger missions, both of which originated in Freetown. This broader review was necessary not only to contextualize the images historically but also to refine the analytical categories used to classify them.

Initially, the research focused exclusively on images from Freetown and Lagos. However, as the analysis progressed, it became evident that a more comprehensive approach was required. Consequently, the scope was expanded to include images related to the Niger Mission. A closer focus on the period between 1840 and 1890 revealed that the majority of images published

during these decades concerned the Yoruba and Niger missions, whereas images produced prior to 1840 predominantly depicted Sierra Leone and earlier missionary initiatives among the Bullom and Timneh (Temne) peoples. For this reason, a multi-layered filtering process was implemented, classifying images first by mission, then by time period, and finally by thematic content. This process is outlined in detail below.

a. Classification and Naming Process

The first step involved extracting all images related to the West Africa Mission (later referred to as the Sierra Leone Mission), the Yoruba Mission, and the Niger Mission between 1816 and 1890 from the four publications under study: *Church Missionary Papers*, *The Gleaner*, *The Intelligencer*, and *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*.

In the second step, the images were organized into folders corresponding to their respective missions or regions: Sierra Leone, Yoruba, and Niger. In the third step, each image was assigned a standardized name. This naming convention began with the acronym "CMS" (Church Missionary Society), followed by a regional identifier SL for Sierra Leone, Y for Yoruba, and N for Niger, and then an abbreviation indicating the publication: G for *The Gleaner*, GPA for *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, I for *The Intelligencer*, and P for *Missionary Papers*. Each image was also assigned a numerical identifier. Examples of this system include CMS_SL_G_000, CMS_Y_P_000, CMS_N_I_000, and CMS_Y_GPA_000.

Following this initial classification, a second review was conducted to identify images depicting women. These images were compiled into a separate document, organized by publication, mission, and chronology. Given that the primary period of analysis spans from 1840 to 1890, a third filter was applied to isolate images published during that period or explicitly referring to it. At this stage, only images associated with the Yoruba and Niger missions were

retained. These images were then categorized by topic and year, enabling the identification of visual patterns and a preliminary interpretation of how women were represented. The final step of this process was a close visual analysis of the selected images.

Due to space constraints and the need to delimit the corpus, this chapter includes only those images that most clearly represent the dominant themes identified in the analysis. In some cases, image collages are used to present a broader visual sample, while in others, individual images are reproduced at a larger scale to highlight specific details. These thematic groupings align closely with the narratives examined in Chapter Four. Although images related to Sierra Leone were identified, classified, and included in the databases, the analysis presented here focuses exclusively on representations associated with the Bight of Benin and the interior missions.

b. Database Construction

Alongside the image classification process, a database was created to systematically record information for each image. An Excel spreadsheet was used, with a separate table for each publication. The database includes the following fields: year of publication, image title, image type, region or village depicted, mission, and a brief description of the content. When images were accompanied by explanatory text, that information was also recorded; for extended textual discussions, page numbers and relevant keywords were included.

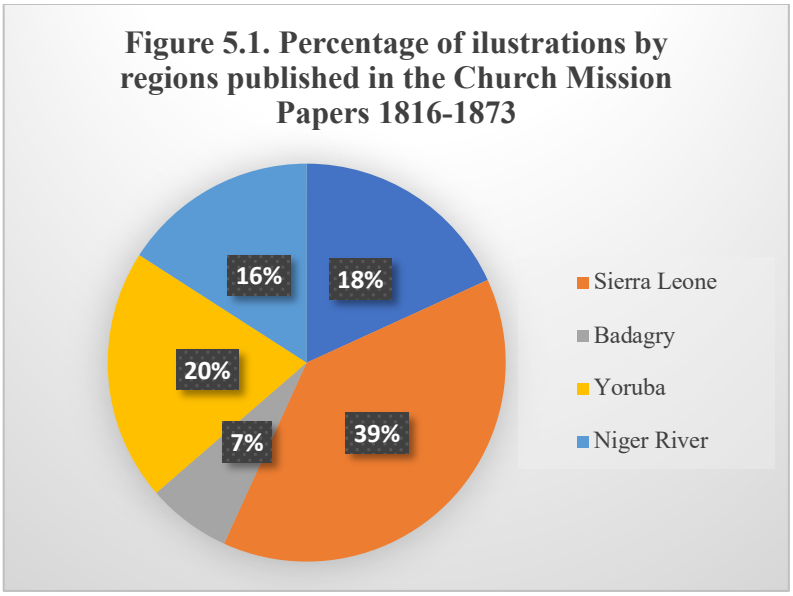
Additional columns documented whether individuals were depicted, and when names were provided in captions or accompanying text, they were recorded accordingly. A dedicated column tracked women's representation, noting whether women appeared in the image, how many were present, their visibility and positioning, their relationship to religious objects or settings, and whether they were central or peripheral figures. Distinctions were also made among

portraits, landscapes, and composite scenes. Once the database was complete, the analysis proceeded from general visual characteristics to more specific representational elements, with sustained attention to women's presence and depiction. Each image was examined individually, followed by a comparative analysis to identify recurring themes, similarities, and divergences. This process ultimately informed the identification of broader patterns and enabled the chapter to address the core research questions outlined at its outset. These images will be available online for free use on an open-source website linked to Freedom Narratives and Slavery images.

C. Representations in the *Church Missionary Papers*, *The Gleaner*, *The Intelligencer*, and *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*

Church Missionary Papers

Since its first publication in 1816, *Missionary Papers* regularly employed engravings on its covers. As illustrated in the accompanying graph, the majority of these images were associated with the West Africa Mission and, after 1821, more specifically with the Sierra Leone Mission. In total, *Missionary Papers* published forty-four images, including engravings and photographic portraits, primarily related to the West Africa and Yoruba missions. These images depicted locations such as Sierra Leone, Badagry, Abeokuta, the Niger River, and various mission stations. The graph below identifies the principal regions represented in images published in *Missionary Papers* between 1816 and 1873.



Source: *Church Missionary Papers*, 1816-1873.

From Sierra Leone, the predominant representations focused on villages and CMS stations, including Bathurst, Freetown, Hastings, Kissey, and York. From the 1840s and 1850s onward, the focus shifted toward the Yoruba Mission. During this period, nine images depicted locations such as Abeokuta, Ake, Ado, Otta, Ibadan, and Oshielle, as well as three images from Badagry. In the 1870s, *Missionary Papers* published seven images related to the Niger River Mission, portraying sites such as Ofin, Ijebu country, Sokoto, and Bonny.

In its earliest issues, *Missionary Papers* addressed developments across multiple regions, while explicitly emphasizing the importance of Christian collaboration in educating "the people in Africa." This didactic intention is evident in early visual narratives, such as the 1816 illustration depicting a Kolloh-man, identified as representing the Devil, and frightened Bullom women and children fleeing his presence, accompanied by a textual appeal to Christian readers to support the CMS.[7] From the outset, women appeared in these visual materials, although they

[7] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1816, 1.

were neither consistently represented nor positioned as central figures. Instead, they formed part of what missionaries presented as the lived realities encountered in the mission field.

As with other CMS publications, *Missionary Papers* also reported on missions in regions such as New Zealand, India, and China. Consequently, not every issue included images related to West Africa. Visual attention to West African missions tended to intensify in years marked by significant events, during which images and narratives were mobilized to underscore missionary achievements and challenges.

The principal themes represented in *Missionary Papers* included landscapes and built environments, such as rivers, markets, villages, and CMS buildings, as well as depictions of inhabitants within these spaces. Other images showed individuals either in portrait form or as members of collective social or religious gatherings, including meetings with local chiefs or scenes of economic activity. Only a limited number of images explicitly portray women, most often in their roles as mothers.

The Gleaner* and *The Intelligencer

A total of 276 images, comprising sketches, engravings, drawings, and photographs, were identified in the *Gleaner*, while the *Intelligencer* included nineteen images. A key distinction between *the Gleaner* and the other publications lies in its more extensive and frequent use of visual material, accompanied by shorter textual articles. Prior to 1874, the *Gleaner* predominantly featured frontispiece illustrations in its monthly issues; thereafter, images became more common throughout the publication.

In the Gleaner, from the 276 images published, forty-three included representations of women. In the *Intelligencer*, nine of the nineteen images depicted women. The relatively limited number of images in the *Intelligencer* reflects a broader decline in visual content after 1864, as

later issues increasingly focused on textual reporting and missions outside West Africa. Articles in *The Intelligencer* tended to be longer, with visual material typically confined to the opening pages of an issue and explained within the text. In contrast, *The Gleaner* frequently integrated images within articles or used brief captions to reinforce narratives drawn from missionaries' journals. In both publications, images functioned as visual representations of missionary experiences in the field.

The dominant themes in *The Gleaner* and *The Intelligencer* mirrored those found in *Missionary Papers*: landscapes, towns, villages, and CMS buildings; infrastructure and new constructions; and the movement of people to churches or between settlements. Other images depicted tools, religious objects, and cultural practices, as well as missionary encounters with local chiefs and efforts to challenge indigenous religious traditions. Portraits of missionaries appeared intermittently, both individually and in group settings. As in *Missionary Papers*, only a limited number of images portrayed women as mothers.

The CMS Pictorial Album

The *Gleaner Pictorial Album* contains fifty-three images related to West Africa. Its principal themes include rural and urban landscapes, forests, coastlines, and cities, as well as depictions of individuals and groups comprising African and European missionaries and local populations. Portraits in the album primarily feature CMS personnel and local chiefs.

Notably, only two portraits of African women appear in the album: Sarah Bonetta, a protégée of Queen Victoria, and Hanna Afala, the mother of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. European women were also marginal to the album's visual narrative; only one image depicts

Anna Hinderer, accompanied by a brief account of her seventeen years of missionary labour in the Yoruba country, as referenced in her published memoirs.[8]

In contrast, the album devotes significant attention to European male figures associated with the CMS, including William Wilberforce, Thomas Fowell Buxton, Edward Bickersteth, Zachary Macaulay, David Hinderer, and Henry Townsend. It also features prominent African missionaries such as James Quaker, Bishop Crowther, Henry Johnson, and Dandeson Coates Crowther. Group photographs depict African and European missionaries together, occasionally accompanied by their wives, particularly in images from Lagos. Additional portraits include African figures such as John Baptist Dasalu, James White, and King Akitoye.

The album further includes representations of CMS buildings, such as Fourah Bay College, residential houses, churches, schools, markets, vessels used for transportation, religious gatherings, weapons, and tools. A selection of these images has been chosen for closer analysis based on their relevance to women's representation.

a. Comparative Overview and Selection Criteria of the Illustrations

Rather than analyzing images strictly by publication, this chapter adopts a comparative approach that draws on visual material from all four publications. This strategy highlights the range and coherence of CMS visual production and allows for a more nuanced assessment of women's presence across formats. Although women rarely appear as central figures, the images demonstrate their participation in religious, economic, and social life within mission communities.

[8] Anna Hinderer, S*eventeen Years in the Yoruba Country. Memorials of Anna Hinderer, wife of the Rev. David Hinderer,* C. M. S. Missionary in Western Africa, ed. C.A. and D. Hone, with an Introduction by Richard B. Hone, M.A. Piccadilly (The religious Track Society, 1872), 17.

Across the publications, the dominant themes include landscapes (cities, villages, rivers, and coasts), movement (travel, flight, and migration), portraits and group scenes of missionaries and local populations, religious and social gatherings, and depictions of women as mothers or labourers. For the purposes of this chapter, only images that include women have been selected; images depicting exclusively male figures or uninhabited landscapes are excluded. Out of the eighty-five images featuring women, forty-six are examined in detail. These images cover various regions and mission settings linked to CMS activities.

The table below summarizes the number of images related to West Africa published in the CMS periodicals, the subset that includes women, and the final selection analyzed in this chapter. Of the 392 images identified, 85 depict women, 57 were selected for detailed analysis, and 10 are repeated across publications. Some images were reproduced in multiple publications or across different years. For example, Street Breakfast appeared in both 1851 and 1879. Additionally, the *Pictorial Album* largely recompiled images previously published in *The Gleaner*; of the nine images, eight were also published in the other publications analyzed here. Each image is analyzed in relation to its original publication context.

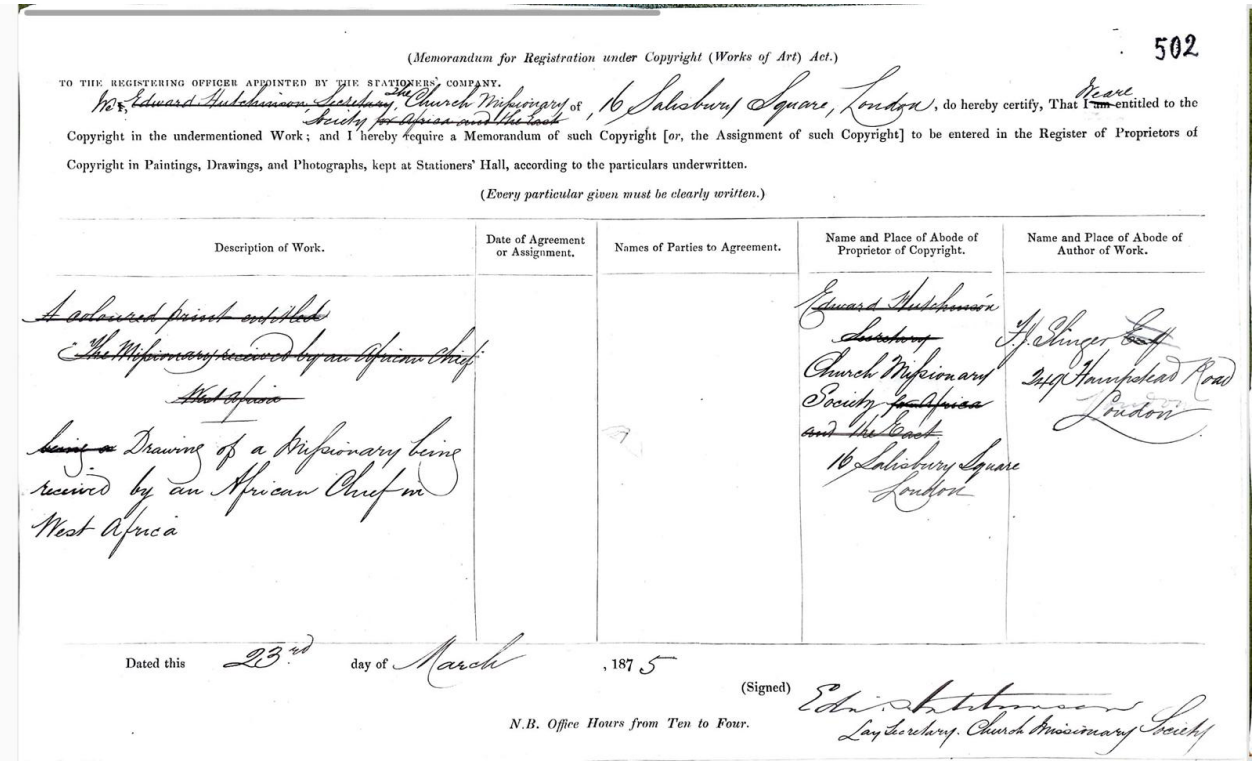
Table 5.1 Images from West Africa published in the CMS newspapers in the nineteenth century

Publication	**Year**	**Total images about West Africa**	**Images that include women**	**Images chosen**
Church Mission Papers	1816-1890	44	18	8
The Gleaner	1842-1914 (1871-1873) *	*276*	43	34
Intelligencer	1850-1900	19	9	6
The Gleaner Pictorial Album	1887-1888	53	15	9
Total		392	85	57

*From 1871 to 1873, no newspapers were printed.

In some CMS publications, authorship of the images, whether sketches, engravings, or photographs, is acknowledged either in the caption or within the accompanying text. However, in a significant number of cases, this information is absent. Despite this lack of individual attribution, copyright ownership of the images was consistently held by the Church Missionary Society. This is confirmed by archival documentation, including records of copyright registration preserved in The National Archives at Kew, London. The example reproduced below illustrates the formal registration of CMS visual materials as copyrighted works of art, underscoring the Society's institutional control over the production and circulation of its images.

Figure 5.2. Registration of copyright of Works of Art, Kew archive



(Memorandum for Registration under Copyright (Works of Art) Act.)

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TO THE REGISTERING OFFICER APPOINTED BY THE STATIONERS' COMPANY.

I, ~~Edward Hutchinson, Secretary~~ for Church Missionary Society ~~for Africa and the East~~ of 16 Salisbury Square, London, do hereby certify, That I am ~~entitled~~ to the Copyright in the undermentioned Work; and I hereby require a Memorandum of such Copyright [or, the Assignment of such Copyright] to be entered in the Register of Proprietors of Copyright in Paintings, Drawings, and Photographs, kept at Stationers' Hall, according to the particulars underwritten.

(Every particular given must be clearly written.)

Description of Work.	Date of Agreement or Assignment.	Names of Parties to Agreement.	Name and Place of Abode of Proprietor of Copyright.	Name and Place of Abode of Author of Work.
~~A coloured print entitled~~ ~~The Missionary received by an African Chief~~ ~~West Africa~~ ~~being a~~ Drawing of a Missionary being received by an African Chief in West Africa			~~Secretary~~ Church Missionary Society ~~for Africa and the East~~ 16 Salisbury Square London	J. Singer Esq 34 Hampstead Road London

Dated this 23rd day of March, 1875

(Signed) Edwd Hutchinson

Lay Secretary. Church Missionary Society

N.B. Office Hours from Ten to Four.

Source: The National Archive, Kew, London.

To structure the visual analysis, the selected images are organized according to the following thematic categories:

1. Landscapes of Rivers, Villages, and Towns
    1.1 Rivers as Centers of Communication
    1.2 Villages and CMS Buildings
2. Movement (travel, flight, migration)
3. Religious and Social Gatherings
    3.1 Meetings between Local Chiefs or Kings and Missionaries
    3.2 Group Photographs of Missionaries and Portraits of Female Missionaries
    3.3 Women's Gatherings: Religion and Dance
4. Women as Labourers and Mothers
    4.1 Women as the Labour Force
    4.2 Women as Mothers

The following sections analyze selected images according to this classification, focusing on visual narratives produced between 1840 and 1890. These images are treated not merely as illustrations but as historical sources that convey the CMS's interpretive frameworks and communicative strategies. Through close visual analysis, this chapter reconstructs the roles women played within mission contexts and demonstrates that, despite their marginal positioning, women were active agents in the formation and everyday life of CMS missions in West Africa.

1. Landscapes of the rivers, villages and towns

In CMS publications, towns and villages are depicted with women mainly in the background rather than as central figures. While they are not the focus, their presence reflects the realities of the local people. Over time, these images show how the Church Missionary Society (CMS) impacted environments: towns became more urban, architectural styles shifted, and dress patterns changed. Although most images feature rural areas, some depict the transition of towns into more urbanized spaces. This section also showcases buildings constructed by the CMS at mission stations and sites along the coast or near rivers.

1.1. Rivers as centers of communications

In CMS newspapers, landscapes and background scenery play a significant role, with rivers among the most frequently represented features. In most cases, rivers are portrayed as essential routes for communication and transportation, facilitating the movement of people, goods, and supplies.[9] These images emphasize the connective function of rivers, linking towns and villages situated along riverbanks or near the coast. The images examined in this section depict territories within the Bight of Benin, specifically what the missionaries called "Yoruba country," the Niger River, and settlements located in close proximity to waterways. At the same time, they portray the people who lived in and moved through these environments.

The image *Crossing a River in the Yoruba Country* illustrates a journey commonly undertaken by missionaries travelling between towns. As described in the accompanying article, "sometimes a river has to be crossed in some way or other, perhaps in the manner represented in our engraving. There we have our Missionary, the Rev. H. Townsend, and Mrs. Townsend, on a journey to a large town called Shaki (Map 3.12), crossing a river on calabashes. The person to be conveyed sits on the calabash, while a native from behind, paddling in the water with his feet, moves it across."[10] This image foregrounds missionary mobility while situating it within a broader border landscape shaped by local knowledge and labour.

[9] According to Falola and Usman, Yorubaland is dominated by north-to-south flowing rivers. These rivers feed into the Niger River, known locally in Yoruba as Odo Ọya or River Ọya. Major rivers such as the Yewa, Ogun, Ọsun, Sasa, Ọmi, Ọni, and Oluwa flow southward into the Benin lagoon and the Benin River, which connects to the Niger Delta creeks. This natural system of communication provides an inland canoe route and an east–west trade route for goods and people. Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 9.

[10] "Itinerating," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1856, 40



Illustration 5.1. "Crossing a river in the Yoruba country," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1856, 37.

The article "Itinerating," published in *The Gleaner* in 1856 and accompanying a related image, narrates the repeated journeys undertaken by missionaries as they explored new areas and returned to established stations. These movements are framed as precursors to the establishment of mission houses, contingent upon authorization from local chiefs. As the text explains, "After a first or second visit, ground for a Mission - house having been obtained from the chiefs, a native visitor is first sent, and after a time, as the labourers arrive from home, an European Missionary, who finds himself amidst the thousands of a most interesting people, amongst whom he goes day by day and sows his seed, the only limit to his labours being his own amount of strength."[11] The missionary work intensified with the arrival of European missionaries, who laboured among large populations in an ongoing process of evangelization. Within the visual scene, women were near the river, conversing with one another, while other figures waited to cross. This is an

[11] "Itinerating," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1856, 40

everyday activity that situates women within the rhythms of local life rather than missionary endeavour.

A similar dynamic appears in “Scene on a River in the Yoruba Country.” Here, men and women are shown crossing or preparing to cross the river, mainly using canoes instead of calabashes. Women were present on both riverbanks, carrying goods and dressed in locally made cloth. The scene illustrates people walking, waiting, and interacting, with a building near the river indicating a node of social or commercial activity. Once again, women are portrayed as active participants in river life, within a landscape that highlights mobility, exchange, and daily labour.



Illustration 5.2. “Scene on a River in the Yoruba country,” Church Missionary Intelligencer, 1859, 259.

The article accompanying this image discusses missionary activity in the Yoruba country, focusing on both established and newly founded stations, as well as on the local populations encountered by missionaries in the towns they visited. For example, Mr. Gollmer recounts an encounter with an elderly woman whom he initially expected to oppose his preaching: “From

one elderly female, with many signs about her, which showed that she was a zealous worshipper of gods many and lords many, I apprehended strong opposition, but she proved the most attentive of all; so much so, that she did not care to sell anything, or take money for what she had sold, while I was speaking; and when I had finished, she declared, with apparent sincerity, that from that day she would serve God alone, thanking us."[12] These conversion stories informed readers and supporters of the Church in England about the work the missionaries were doing on-site and, by emphasizing the woman's age, proved that people of all ages could be converted as well. With regard to the scene depicted in the engraving, the accompanying note explains that the missionaries approached from the north and, after crossing several rivers, reached Awoyade, located nine miles from Abeokuta. There, "they took possession of an old tottering house, open on all sides,"[13] which became the site from which they began preaching to the local population.

The CMS had established several long-standing mission stations in the Yoruba region, including Lagos, Otta, Abeokuta, Ibadan, and Ijaye. In these central locations, the number of converts had increased, and missionary activity was described as having reached a more advanced and stable phase. The Society had also expanded into new strategic areas, notably Oyo and Ishaga, where European catechists were stationed. In addition, a network of smaller outstations was developed and initially staffed by African evangelists. Altogether, the mission comprised seven principal stations, with a reported total of 1,595 adult African Christians, of whom 894 were communicants.

The text also provides a detailed description of urban life in the Yoruba country, emphasizing dense settlement patterns, agricultural practices, and commercial activity that characterized the region. Towns were surrounded by cultivated farmland, where crops such as

[12] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1859, 262.
[13] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1859, 262.

maize, cotton, and Guinea grass were carefully planted and maintained. Ongoing warfare and political instability led to the fortification of these towns with clay walls, gates, and ditches. Within the walls, residential compounds were densely arranged along narrow streets, leading to central marketplaces that served as the social and economic heart of each town.

The marketplace is presented as a vibrant space where people from different social groups, including men, women, farmers, artisans, and traders, gathered to buy, sell, and interact. Women played a prominent role in commercial life, particularly as traders, and their voices, greetings, and social exchanges filled the public space. The range of goods available reflected both local production and wider trade networks, including foodstuffs, textiles, clothing, weapons, and household items.[14]

The text also highlights Yoruba social customs, especially the highly ritualized and linguistically complex practices of greeting and politeness. Greetings were used to mark the time of day, express respect, ensure safety, and acknowledge social relationships. Through these descriptions, the passage portrays Yoruba society as organized, industrious, and culturally rich, while simultaneously framing it through a missionary lens that characterizes it as "semi-civilized" and in need of Christian transformation.

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[14] According to Shields, Byfield, and McIntosh, women were simultaneously producers, traders, and consumers. Expanding on the central role of women in Yoruba markets and trade, Marshall argues that in the nineteenth century, while most women traded locally, some travelled between markets more than one hundred miles apart, and long-distance commerce was primarily conducted by women beyond childbearing age. Women with young children generally focused on local and nearby markets. Within town markets, "nearly all the trade" was conducted by women, most of whom were producer-traders who manufactured and sold goods such as soap, pottery, oils, cloth, beverages, and prepared foods. Many women also marketed surplus crops produced by their husbands. Gloria Albertha Marshall, "Women, Trade and the Yoruba Family" (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1964), 2, 249, 250. Judith A. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* (Heinemann, 2002). Francine Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women in an Era of Economic and Social Transition in 19th Century Yorubaland (South-Western Nigeria)" (PhD diss. University of Stirling, 1997). Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change* (Indiana University Press, 2009).

In the image titled "'The Book' at the Confluence on the River Niger," a group of local inhabitants is shown gathered around missionaries. Among them is a woman carrying a child on her back, accompanied by two other children standing nearby. As the analysis of subsequent images will demonstrate, women are frequently represented in a similar manner: they appear in small numbers, often one or two, surrounded by a predominance of male figures. In this particular image, the woman occupies a position in the foreground rather than being diminished in scale or relegated entirely to the background; however, she remains spatially positioned behind the male figures. This compositional arrangement underscores the visibility of women in the scene while reinforcing their secondary status in the visual hierarchy of missionary encounters.



Illustration 5.3. "'The book' at the Confluence on the River Niger," *Church Missionary Papers*, 1860, 1.

This image served as the frontispiece of *Missionary Papers* in 1860. The accompanying description situates the scene at the Confluence of the Niger River, described as "the point at

which its two great branches meet, and flow in one stream to the sea." In the foreground, "some of our native Catechists from Sierra Leone" are shown presenting "the book" to what the text characterizes as "poor heathen and Mohammedans."[15] The setting thus combines a geographically strategic landscape with a carefully staged act of evangelization.

The two missionaries depicted in the image were members of an expedition that travelled up the Niger in 1857. They are shown displaying a published book whose significance derived not only from its content but also from the identities of its authors. As emphasized in the publication, both authors were African clergymen and missionaries who had themselves converted to Christianity and were now committed to spreading it within their own societies. One was the prominent Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther; the other was the younger African minister, the Rev. J. O. Taylor. Their presence visually reinforces the CMS's emphasis on African agency within the missionary project, while simultaneously situating that agency within a framework defined by European evangelical authority.[16]

As a frontispiece, the image plays a specific role in shaping readers' interpretations. By setting the scene at the Niger Confluence, it symbolically frames Christian expansion within a space associated with mobility, encounter, and imperial aspiration. Presenting "the book" serves as a visual symbol of spiritual authority, literacy, and religious transformation. At the same time, representing local populations through the language of "heathen" and "Mohammedans" reflects CMS discourse. Through the association of image and text, this frontispiece constructs a narrative of missionary progress in which African intermediaries are rendered visible yet remain

[15] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1860, 2.
[16] Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor, *The Gospel on the banks of the Niger: journals and notices of the native missionaries accompanying the Niger expedition of 1857–1859* (Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, 1859).

embedded within a civilizing framework that privileges Christianity as both morally and culturally superior.

As in the *Church Missionary Papers*, *The Gleaner* in 1880 featured several images depicting scenes along the Niger River. In particular, two of these illustrations depicted women. The images were based on sketches originally sent to The Graphic by Capt. F. Haynes. The first sketch portrays the indigo pits in the village of Lokoja, where cloth was traditionally dyed. In this scene, one woman holds a piece of fabric while another carries a load on her head. To the right, the indigo pits are clearly visible. In the background, a group of houses enclosed by a fence can be seen, along with a path that connects the exterior of the settlement to its interior.



Illustration 5.4. "Scenes of the River Niger: Indigo dyed pits, Lokoja," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1880, 18.

This illustration places women in a productive, communal space, highlighting their involvement in textile processing and everyday labour. Unlike many missionary images that confined women to domestic or passive roles, this scene portrays them as active participants in an economic practice tied to local expertise and material culture. The act of dyeing cloth,

indicated by the presence of the indigo pits, underscores women's contribution to sustaining both household and community livelihoods.[17]

In the next image from the same Lokoja collage, several women are shown engaged in conversation. One woman is holding a child, while another carries a basin on her head. All three women wear ankle bracelets and are dressed in small cloths wrapped around their bodies, leaving their upper bodies uncovered. Their attire contrasts with the representations of Yoruba women from Abeokuta, who are often depicted wearing more European-style clothing. Several male figures appear nearby, but the women remain the primary focus of the scene.



Illustration 5.5. "Scenes of the River Niger: Represents some of the people of Lokoja," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1880, 19.

As in many CMS visual representations, women are depicted in close association with children, domestic responsibilities, and everyday labour. Their roles as mothers, caregivers, and workers are emphasized through bodily posture and activity rather than through individual identity. The presence of a woman holding a child reinforces the association between femininity

[17] In 19th-century Yoruba society, indigo was crucial, holding both economic and cultural importance in textile production. As Byfield notes, the value of cloths depended on the depth of indigo, from owududu, the darkest, to *ofeefe,* the lightest and, also relied on factors like weave quality, thread type, fabric amount, and embroidery detail. Indigo-dyed cloths often indicated status and wealth, especially among chiefs and wealthy individuals who could afford the finest materials. Furthermore, indigo had significant ritual and symbolic meanings. Byfield, *Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta,* 11, 12.

and motherhood, while the act of carrying goods on the head highlights women's physical labour within local economies. At the same time, these images do not portray women as passive figures. Their engagement in conversation and daily activities suggests social interaction and communal participation.[18]

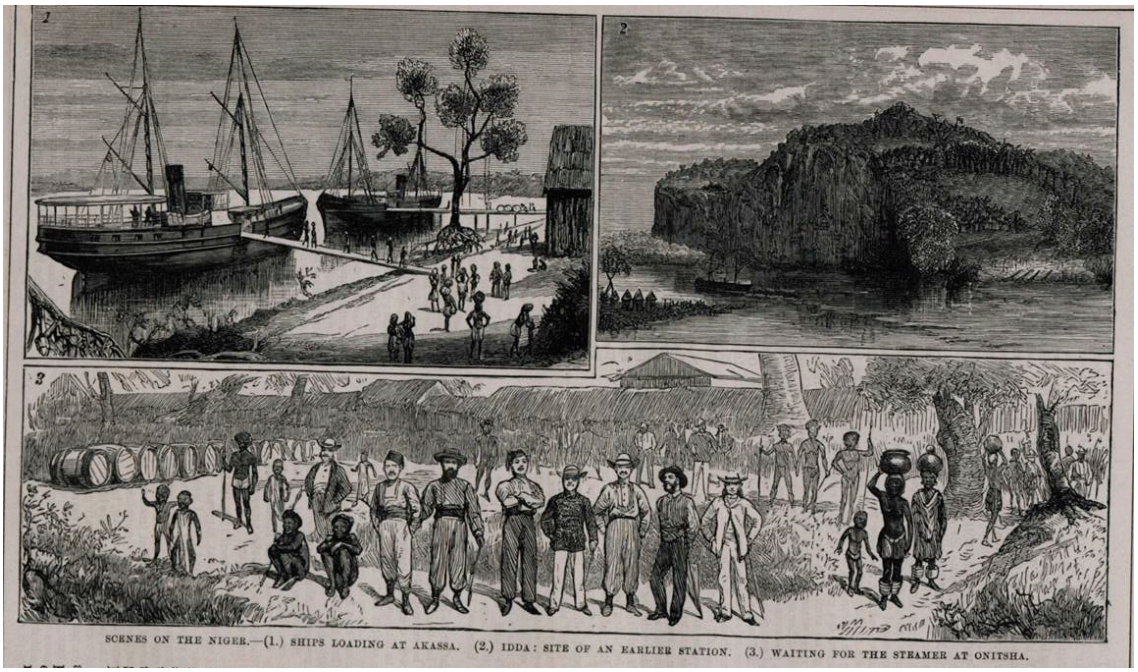
In the *Gleaner* of 1881, a collage of three images presents different scenes of life along the Niger River. The first shows people loading merchandise onto ships at Akassa, emphasizing the role of river transport in commercial exchange. The second shows an earlier mission station at Idda, while the third illustrates a group of people waiting for the arrival of a steamer at Onitsha, as indicated by the accompanying caption. In this final image, several men dressed in European-style clothing are distinguishable, while, on the right-hand side, women are shown carrying goods and accompanied by children. In the background, additional figures appear, including both British-dressed individuals and local men and women.

These scenes highlight the central role of the Niger River as a corridor of movement, trade, and missionary activity. Steamers not only transported people between coastal communities but also circulated commercial goods that sustained regional economies. For example, "In the delta of the Niger, chiefs of Bonny, Brass, and New Calabar have grown rich on the trade in palm oil with England, and at these places a strange mixture is seen of barbarism and the beginnings of civilization."[19]

At the same time, locations such as Lokoja and Onitsha had become key CMS mission stations, and river transport was a crucial means of connecting missionaries with local

[18] As Byfield and Shields argue, nineteenth-century Yoruba women were far more than domestic actors, they participated in long-distance trade networks, engaged in textile production and indigo dyeing, and contributed to both household and commercial manufacturing. Byfield, *Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta.*
[19] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1881, 91. Antony Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies: African Merchants in Lagos, 1851–1931* (Princeton University Press, 2024). Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland."

populations. Within this visual narrative, women are consistently represented in association with labour and caregiving, carrying goods and attending to children, reinforcing their portrayal as active participants in everyday economic life while remaining largely absent from the spheres of religious authority and institutional power that characterized missionary expansion.



Illustrations "Scenes of the Niger: **5.6.** Ships loading at Akassa, **5.7.** Idda: site of earlier station. **5.8.** Waiting for the steamer at Onitsha," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1881, 90.

The article accompanying this image traces the development of the gospel mission along the Niger River, beginning with the first expedition in August 1841. This expedition "consisted of three British steamers fitted out by Government, under the auspices of Prince Albert and Lord John Russell," and included two agents of the Church Missionary Society: Rev. J. F. Schön and Samuel Crowther. Thirteen years later, in 1854, a second expedition took place, again accompanied by Crowther, who by then had become an ordained and experienced missionary.

Three years after that, Crowther ascended the river for a third time, now commissioned by the Society to establish a permanent Niger Mission.[20]

In the early years of the mission, African teachers were stationed in villages along the riverbanks, often remaining isolated for long periods before receiving visits from Crowther or other missionaries. The difficulties of travel were considerable, as in 1857, when Crowther was shipwrecked 400 miles from the sea and detained there for a year. Between 1859 and 1861, two full years passed without any vessel available to take him upriver. By contrast, the situation had changed significantly by the late nineteenth century. Trading steamers now regularly navigated the Niger, transporting English manufactured goods inland and carrying local produce back toward the coast. Important trading posts had been established at several points along the river, including Onitsha, Lokoja (at the confluence of the two branches), and Egan, 320 miles from the sea.[21]

By 1881, Bishop Crowther had founded eleven mission stations: in the delta at Bonny, New Calabar, Brass, and Akassa; further upriver at Osamare, Alenso, Onitsha, and Asaba; at Lokoja and Gbebe on opposite sides of the confluence of the Kworra and the Binue (or Chadda); and at Egan, still farther inland on the Kworra. Although most of these stations included a small number of African Christians, the article notes that "it is only at two places, Bonny and Brass, that there has been a remarkable blessing."[22]

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[20] James Frederick Schön and Samuel Crowther. *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, on Behalf of the Church Missionary Society*. Hatchard and Son, 1842. Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an expedition up the Niger and Tshadda rivers undertaken by Macgregor Laird in connection with the British Government in 1854*. Church Missionary House, 1855. Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor. *The Gospel on the banks of the Niger: journals and notices of the native missionaries accompanying the Niger expedition of 1857–1859*. Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, 1859.

[21] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1881, 91. E. A. Ayandele, "The missionary factor in Northern Nigeria 1870–1918," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 3 (1966): 503–522.

[22] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1881, 92. Samuel Crowther, *Niger mission: Bishop Crowther's report of the overland journey. From Lokoja to Bida, on the River Niger, and thence to Lagos, on the seacoast, from November*

The text highlights the symbolic importance of conversions among local leaders. At Brass, "the late king, Ockiya, and several of the chiefs, gave up their idols to the bishop five years ago,"[23] and Ockiya himself was baptized by Archdeacon Dandeson Crowther on his deathbed in 1879, in the presence of 250 people and six chiefs. In the village of Tuwon, the article reports a similar decline in traditional religious practices: "The village of Tuwon seems to be almost cleared of these idols; the only priestess, an old woman whom I saw, seemed very much reduced for want of means to procure provisions, there being no applicants for divination." The priestess is described as "very much mortified at the influence of Christianity, which is annihilating the gods out of the country."[24] The population of Tuwon is estimated at fewer than 600, with approximately 500 identified as Christians.[25]

Finally, the article emphasizes the growing importance of institutionalizing Christian education along the Niger. It argues for "the sound and systematic training of the present and future teachers and ministers of the rising African Churches," including regular theological instruction by Archdeacon Crowther and Johnson, the preparation of Christian texts in local languages, and the establishment of small boarding schools for boys. The promotion of female missionary work is also highlighted, particularly through the involvement of the wives of African

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10th, 1871, to February 8th, 1872. Church Missionary House, 1872. Jesse Page, *Samuel Crowther, the slave boy who became Bishop of the Niger* (Fleming Revell, 1888). Andrew Barnes, "Samuel Ajayi Crowther: African and Yoruba Missionary Bishop," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (Oxford University Press, 2018)

[23] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1881, 92.

[24] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1881, 92.

[25] According to Kolapo, "Crowther was not the only missionary who aimed at evangelizing among the Muslims of "Central Africa." For example, David Hinderer of the Yoruba Mission, who arrived in Nigeria in 1849, was sent by the CMS as a missionary to the Muslim Hausa region. In 1855, CMS missionary Adolphus Mann visited Ilorin, and in 1855, Henry Townsend also visited Ilorin, but neither was able to persuade the emir to allow Christian missionaries into his Muslim territory. Femi J. Kolapo, *Christian Missionary Engagement in Central Nigeria, 1857–1891* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 2.

Agents. Special attention is given to Mrs. Dandeson Crowther's role in advancing this aspect of the mission.[26]

The next image accompanied an article in the *Gleaner* that narrated "The Niger and the Soudan," drawing on extracts from the journals of Mr. G. Wilmot Brookes. In his account, Lokoja is described as a small town with "a very fair number of Hausa traders in it, from all parts of the Hausa States. Among these a Native clergyman has laboured with great perseverance for a good number of years, being a very good Hausa scholar."[27] Although the image is not directly described in the text, it serves as a visual representation of the place. In the foreground, two women are visible: one carries a child on her back, while the other holds another child's hand. In the background, steamers navigate the Niger River, and a line of buildings stands along the riverbank. The image is based on a sketch by Archdeacon Crowther, son of Bishop Samuel Crowther, of the view of Kito Hill from Egga on the Upper Niger River.

[26] Kolapo argues that although women are often overlooked in male-centric missionary stories, they played a crucial role at the Confluence. They constituted the majority of converts and provided essential financial support, as did Ayin, an enslaved woman, who then became a significant contributor during the mission's early years, from 1860 to 1861. These women used their church involvement to pursue personal freedom and social recognition in a society that practised slavery. Kolapo, *Christian missionary engagement in Central Nigeria*, vii.

[27] *The Niger and the Soudan. Extracts from Mr. G. Wilmot Brookes journals*, *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1890, 27.

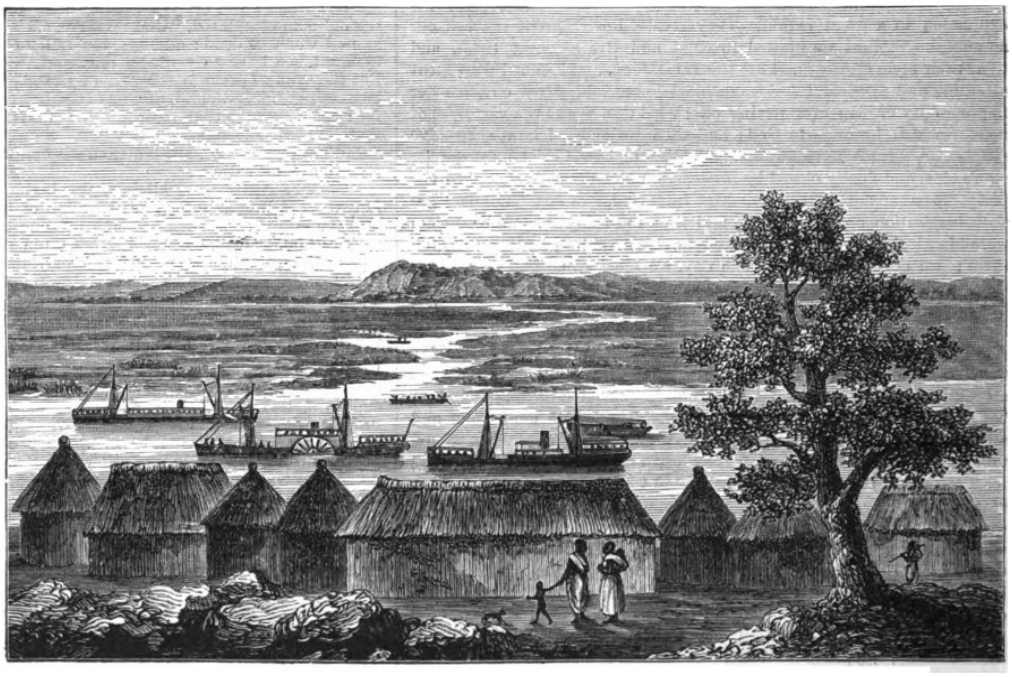

Illustration 5.9. "View of Kito Hill, from Egga, Upper Niger," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1890, 28.

The scene places everyday life within a landscape shaped by commerce, mobility, and environmental abundance. In the background, steamers navigating the Niger River symbolize European technological presence, commercial circulation, and the broader processes of colonial mobility and missionary expansion. In contrast, the foreground focuses on two female figures standing near a group of huts, accompanied by a child. This composition emphasizes a domestic and communal setting rather than a missionary or religious one, anchoring the image in the routines of daily life.

The positioning of the women highlights their role as caretakers within both the household and the wider community. Their visibility in the foreground ensures that women are not rendered invisible within representations of African society, even as they remain confined to the domestic sphere. The inclusion of a child further reinforces themes of continuity, reproduction, and generational transmission, underscoring women's central importance in sustaining social and cultural structures.

The image titled "Market Canoes near Bokweh" illustrates the economic activities carried out along the riverbanks. In the foreground, women are shown carrying bags on their heads, indicating their involvement in transporting goods and participating in local commercial networks. Their presence underscores the central role of women in sustaining everyday economic life in riverside communities.[28]

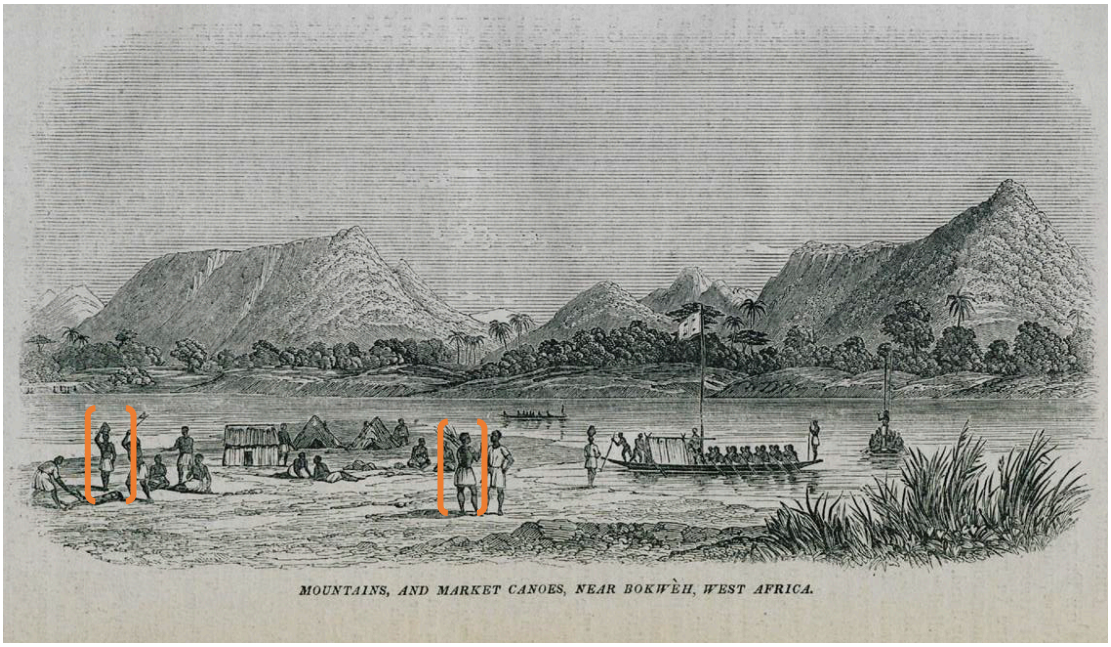

Illustration 5.10. "Mountains and Market Canoes, near Bokweh, West Africa," *Church Missionary Paper*, no. CIII, Michaelmas, 1841 (Cover)[29]

The engraving depicts the River Niger, and the accompanying text explains that, in this region, "there are no roads, as there are in many other countries; and therefore, it is very difficult and dangerous, and sometimes almost impossible, to travel any distance by land." By contrast, the great rivers, described as "the high roads of Africa," facilitated movement and access to the

[28] Women dominated local market trade in nineteenth-century Yorubaland. They not only sold goods in local markets but also engaged in long-distance trading, weaving, dyeing, and pottery. The transportation of goods relied mainly on human porters and waterways, as the Yoruba rarely had access to pack animals. Goods were transported either by canoe along coastal lagoons and rivers or carried on women's heads. This reliance on human labour for moving goods highlighted the importance of women's physical effort and economic participation within regional commercial networks. McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change*, 3, 38.
[29] *Church Missionary Paper*, no. CIII, Michaelmas, 1841.

interior of the continent. The Niger, believed to extend more than 2,600 miles toward the north and northwest, together with its tributary, the Chadda, enabled travellers to reach far into the interior towards the east.

The text further emphasizes the commercial activity along these waterways, noting that "the people who live in the neighborhood of these rivers are very ready to trade with one another, and with Europeans, as you perceive by the market-boats in the Engraving."[30] However, this economic exchange is framed within a moral narrative that condemns the slave trade.[31] Through the combination of image and text, the publication highlights women's participation in local trade, while accompanying narrative reframes these activities within a broader missionary discourse that sought to expose the horrors of slavery and justify Christian intervention in the region.

1.2. Villages and edifications

The following images depict villages and the construction of CMS stations in Badagry, Abeokuta, Lagos, and Ibadan. These visual materials illustrate how missionary intervention transformed local landscapes, introducing new architectural and institutional features as villages became permanent stations for CMS preachers. While the previous images focused on missionary movement and the journeys undertaken to reach inland African communities, this section shifts attention to the processes of settlement and construction. It examines how missionaries established enduring physical presences in the places they visited and ultimately chose to inhabit.

Some of the returnees disembarked at this site and remained there temporarily. It also served as a point of arrival before moving into the interior. From this location, expeditions to

[30] *Church Missionary Paper*, no. CIII, Michaelmas, 1841, 2
[31] *Church Missionary Paper*, no. CIII, Michaelmas, 1841.

Abeokuta, Lagos, and the Niger region were organized and launched. Badagry, an important station for the Church Missionary Society, served as a place where missionaries such as Townsend, Gollmer, and Crowther stayed while awaiting permission and the appropriate conditions to proceed to Abeokuta.[32]

Badagry had served as a key point of arrival and transition for returnees and missionaries alike. Many disembarked here before moving inland, and from this coastal station, expeditions were organized toward Abeokuta, Lagos, and the Niger region. As an important CMS station, Badagry served as a logistical and institutional hub, where figures such as Rev. Townsend, Gollmer, and Crowther remained until conditions allowed them to proceed to Abeokuta. They were detained in Badagry for over eighteen months following the death of Chief Sodeke of Abeokuta. During this period, they visited the Egba encampment at Ado; however, since they could not settle in the interior, "the missionaries began to turn their attention to the spiritual wants of the mixed population."[33] In his journal from January 1845, Mr. Gollmer wrote, "all hands were engaged in the most arduous and exciting job of seeing our goods and houses landed and conveyed to Badagry."[34] He and Crowther used to preach under an umbrella tree in a strategic location "between two markets" before the mission house was built.[35]

The following engraving, published in the *Intelligencer* in 1850, offered a detailed view of Badagry at a time when the settlement was growing while still retaining extensive agricultural zones. The CMS buildings, most notably the church and school, occupied a central position within the settlement, symbolizing the mission's institutional presence. At the same time,

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[32] Caroline Sorensen, "Badagry 1784–1863. The Political and Commercial History of a Pre-Colonial Lagoonside Community in Southwest Nigeria" (Ph.D. Thesis University of Stirling, 1995), 233–234. Charles A. Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 13–14.
[33] Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa*, 15.
[34] Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa*, 14.
[35] Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa*, 15.

cultivated fields and river traffic remained prominent, indicating the continued importance of agriculture and water-based mobility.

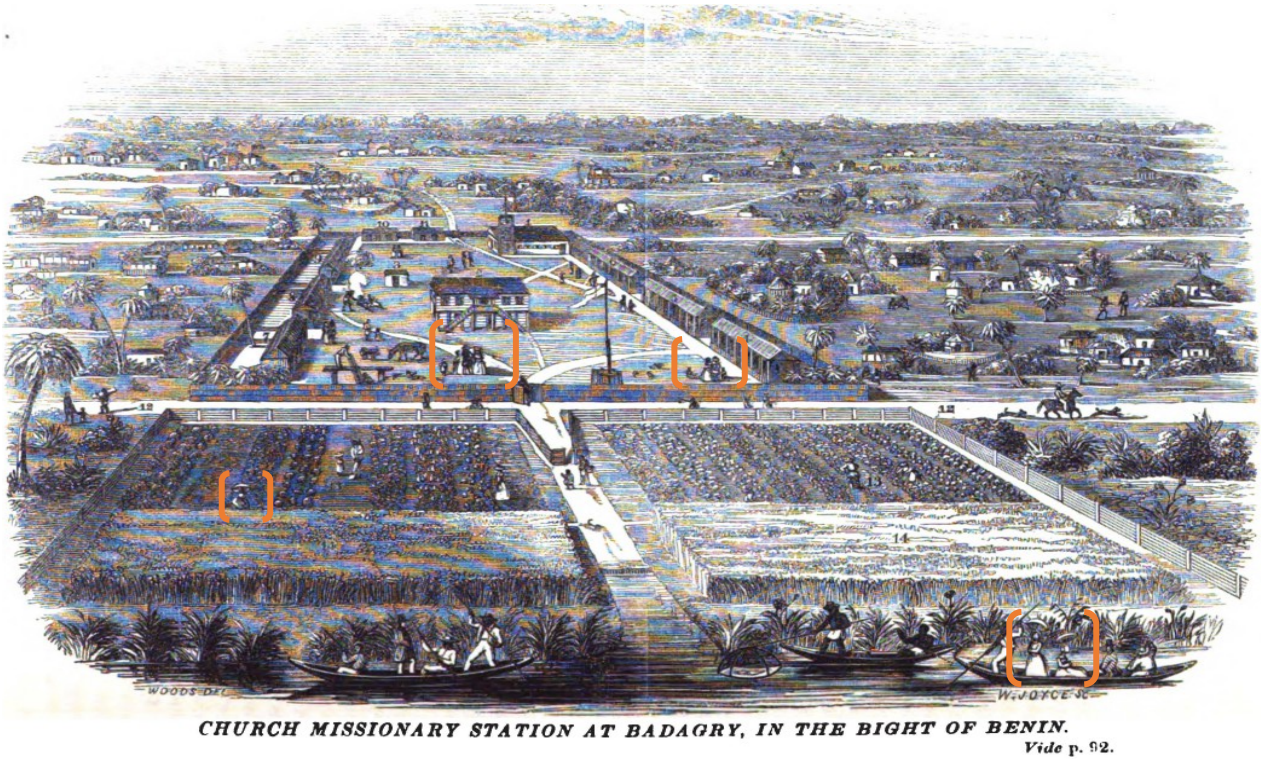


Illustration 5.11. "Church Missionary Station at Badagry, in the Bight of Benin," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1850, 82.[36]

Women appear throughout the composition in multiple social and economic roles. Near the school, two family groups are visible, suggesting domestic life within the mission compound. In the fields, women are shown working, reinforcing their association with agricultural labour. On the river, a canoe carries additional female figures, one standing and one seated, emphasizing women's mobility and hierarchical positions. Although their clothing reflects a more European style, it is difficult to distinguish African from European women due to the size of the representations, but the visual narrative remains consistent: women are represented as workers,

[36] This image was also published in Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa*, 25.

wives, mothers, and caregivers, embedded within both the domestic and productive spheres of missionary life.

The engraving is carefully organized and numerically labelled, identifying key structures within the mission station:

1. Church
2. Mission House
3. Kitchen
4. Schoolmaster's Dwelling
5. Boarding School
6. Labourers' Dwelling
7. Shed and Carpenter's Shop
8. Interpreter's House
9. Watchman's Dwelling
10. **Widows' Shelter**
11. Stable
12. Street
13. Vegetable Garden
14. Rice Garden

This spatial arrangement reflects the institutional order imposed by the CMS and highlights the integration of religious, educational, domestic, and agricultural functions within the mission landscape. A special mission to the existence of a Widows' shelter.

As described in the accompanying text, the station at Badagry was established in early 1845 on the Slave Coast of West Africa. With the exception of the central Mission House, the church and surrounding buildings were constructed from locally sourced materials, including forest timber, bamboo, and palm leaves. Unlike indigenous/local houses, which followed the "African rule" of "low doors and no windows," the mission buildings were designed with greater attention to comfort and ventilation. "The people look upon these houses and admire them, as if the materials they sold us have, by some means, undergone a wonderful change in our hands."[37]

[37] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1850, 92.

These houses are inhabited by the schoolmaster, interpreter, labourers, servants, their families, boarders, and several widows, for a total of between sixty and seventy residents. The Mission House itself was built from African timber, framed in Sierra Leone, and erected by four "Liberated Africans" under missionary supervision. The entire station was enclosed by a bamboo fence, reinforcing its physical and symbolic separation from surrounding settlements. In front of the buildings, a large garden produced rice, arrowroot, and a variety of European and African vegetables, which missionaries presented as a model for local agricultural practice.[38]

The mission's location along the Ossa River further enhanced its strategic importance. Flowing nearly parallel to the coast from Cape St. Paul's to Benin, the river provided access to inland regions. Rich in fish, it supported both subsistence and trade. A narrow strip of land separated it from the sea, making Badagry a crucial node for movement along the coast and riverbank.[39] Despite these benefits, environmental factors created substantial challenges. The sandy soil limited agricultural yields, leading to shortages of key crops such as corn, yams, and beans. Consequently, many residents depended on trade, both legal commerce and the slave trade, to support their subsistence.[40]

Taken together, the engraving and its accompanying text portray Badagry as a space of missionary order, economic activity, and social transformation. The mission station's structured layout, the presence of gardens and schools, and the visibility of women engaged in domestic and agricultural labour all reinforce the CMS's vision of moral, spatial, and cultural reform. At the same time, the continued reliance on trade, environmental constraints, and the legacy of slavery reveal the complex realities that shaped life in this coastal mission community.

[38] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1850, 92.
[39] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1850, 92–93.
[40] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1850, 93.

The mission house at Badagry is also visible in the previous image, prominently situated in the settlement's main square. In the foreground, an African "family" is depicted standing near the building, with the woman beside the man. As in earlier representations of Badagry, their clothing reflects a British-influenced style, reinforcing the visual association between missionary presence and cultural transformation. This illustration, published in the *Missionary Papers* in 1847, accompanies a narrative describing the development of the mission under Townsend's leadership after the missionaries were unable to proceed to Abeokuta and instead remained in Badagry to consolidate CMS activity there.

During this expedition in 1845, the missionaries transported a prefabricated frame house from Sierra Leone, and by early June, Mr. Gollmer's house was complete. The accompanying text provides a detailed architectural description: "It is 44 feet long by 26 broad and is raised 10 feet from the ground on a number of stout pillars, trunks of the cabbage or fan palm-tree tarred over. The rooms are 12 feet high, and the piazzas 10 feet. The material is sound African wood, and externally the boards are feather-edged. The basement is painted black, the upper part white, and the windows and landing-place, with the rails of the steps, green. The roof is shingle, tarred over."[41]

[41] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1847, 2. Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa,* 17.

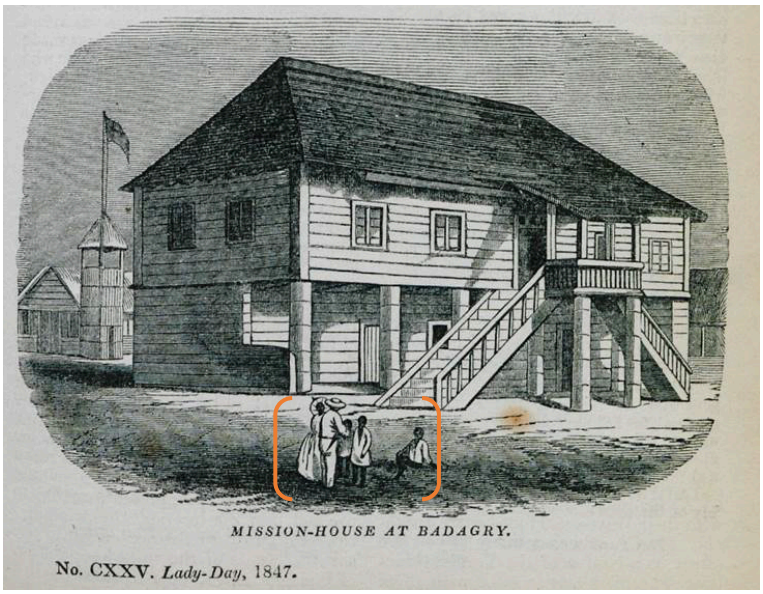


Illustration 5.12. "Mission-House at Badagry," *Church Missionary Papers*, 1847, 1.[42]

This detailed account emphasizes the mission house's visual distinctiveness, presenting it as a carefully constructed, aesthetically ordered structure within the Badagry landscape and as a symbol of missionary permanence and spatial authority. The inclusion of an African family in front of the house situates local inhabitants within this transformed space, suggesting both proximity to and participation in the missionary project. The family's clothing highlights the changes they want to emphasize. According to Byfield, "European dress came to indicate one's wealth, achieved or anticipated social status, and modernity."[43] This also signals the broader changes underway to demonstrate 'civilization'. At the same time, it reflects the broader pattern observed throughout CMS imagery: African women and families are represented within domestic and communal settings, while missionary authority is expressed through buildings, institutions, and spatial organization.

[42] This image was also published in Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa*, 17.
[43] Byfield states that British fashion had become customary among Abeokuta's Christian community. The Saros had embraced British clothing, culture, and Christianity, and the use of certain garments at mission stations, defined as 'the standard wardrobe,' symbolized the new lifestyle. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History*, 67.

The following images illustrate different phases in the architectural development of CMS mission churches, characterized by changes in construction materials and building design in Ake, Abeokuta, and Ibadan. The churches portrayed in the *Missionary Papers* and related publications visually represent the institutional consolidation of Christianity in the mission fields, as well as the collective involvement of local communities in church construction. All of these buildings were part of the CMS missionary network.

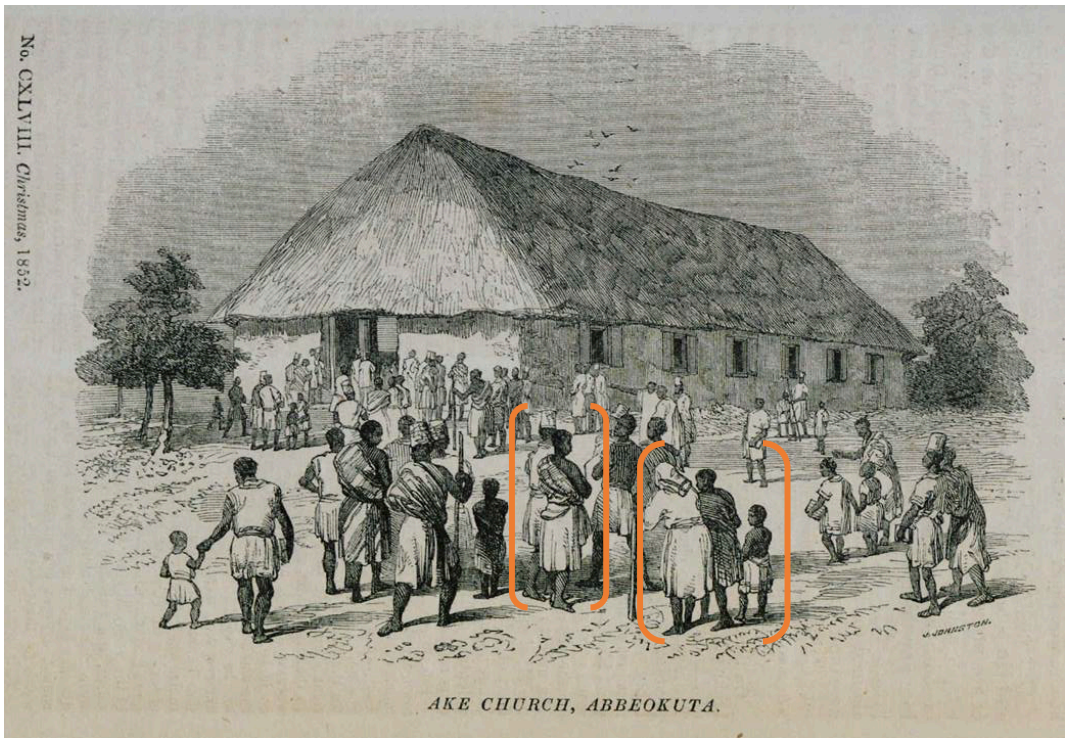


Illustration 5.13. "Ake church, Abeokuta," *Church Missionary Papers*, 1852, 1.[44]

The Church at Ake, Abeokuta, one of the principal CMS stations, offers a clear example of this development.[45] As the accompanying text explains, "Our engraving represent the people

[44] The same image was published in Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa*, 101, under the title "First Church at Lagos." In that publication, there is no reference to the image, and the text before and after the image refers to the "first fruits of our Lagos Mission" to mark the first baptism in Lagos in 1854. This book was published after the *Church Missionary Papers*.

[45] According to Rev. Roper, "In 1846 the missionaries settled in Abeokuta, and in 1847 the first church was opened, near the King's house, at Ake." Edward Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions in West Africa, Facts from Abeokuta*. Part 1. no. 3 (William Hunt and Company, 1869), 10.

collecting for divine service; and He who dwells 'in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,' looks not at the building, but at the temper and state of mind in which they meet together."[46] According to Rev. H. Townsend, members of the congregation actively participated in the enlargement of the church, reflecting both spiritual commitment and communal effort. In the image, women of different ages appear alongside men and children attending the religious service. Most are fully dressed in locally produced cloth rather than European clothing. One elderly woman, distinguishable by her walking cane and head covering, wears a different style of dress, suggesting generational or social variation. Unlike earlier images that primarily depicted younger women and girls, this scene includes women of diverse ages and family groupings. CMS narratives frequently mention older women who eventually joined Christian congregations, sometimes after initial resistance, as in the case of figures such as Hannah Afala (Crowther's mother), highlighting their participation in the process of conversion.

The next image also reflects architectural changes in mission churches. Compared with earlier structures in Abeokuta and Ibadan, the Ake church displays a more developed form in both materials and design. Women and girls attending the service are shown wearing more elaborate clothing, with younger girls fully dressed, contrasting with earlier depictions in which female girls' attire was less formal or complete.

[46] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1852, 1.

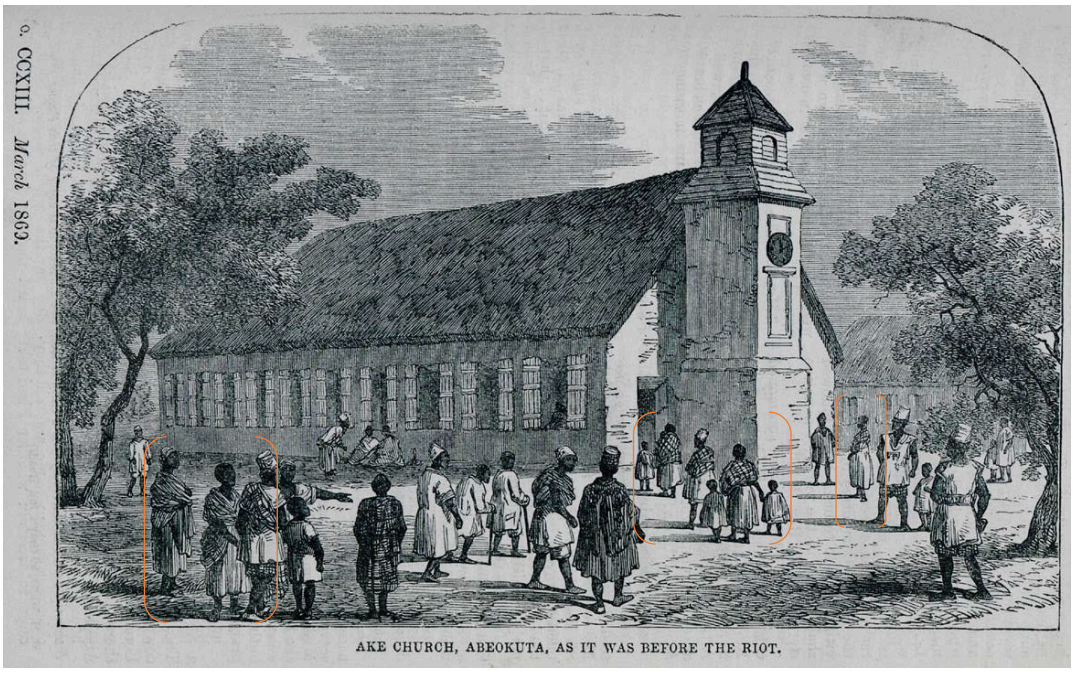


Illustration 5.14. "Ake church, Abeokuta, as it was before the riot," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1869, 85

The Ake church was later rebuilt and reopened for public worship, serving a congregation of nearly 1,000 people, including 316 communicants. However, after outbreaks of violence in Abeokuta, European missionaries temporarily withdrew to Lagos, returning around June 1868. During this period, public worship was forbidden, churches were closed, and mission stations, including those at Ikija, Igbein, Ake, and Owu, were attacked. Indigenous Christians were forced to hold private assemblies. The 1869 image thus represents the church before these disturbances, when worship was vibrant, and the CMS reported approximately 3,000 native Christians and 800 communicants.

A further illustration from the *Gleaner* 1859 depicts the construction of a new church at Abeokuta. In this scene, men are shown piling stones to build the perimeter walls, while four women stand nearby, dancing. The women's clothing differs from that seen in Badagry but

resembles the dress observed in the Ake church image, indicating regional variation in female attire.[47]

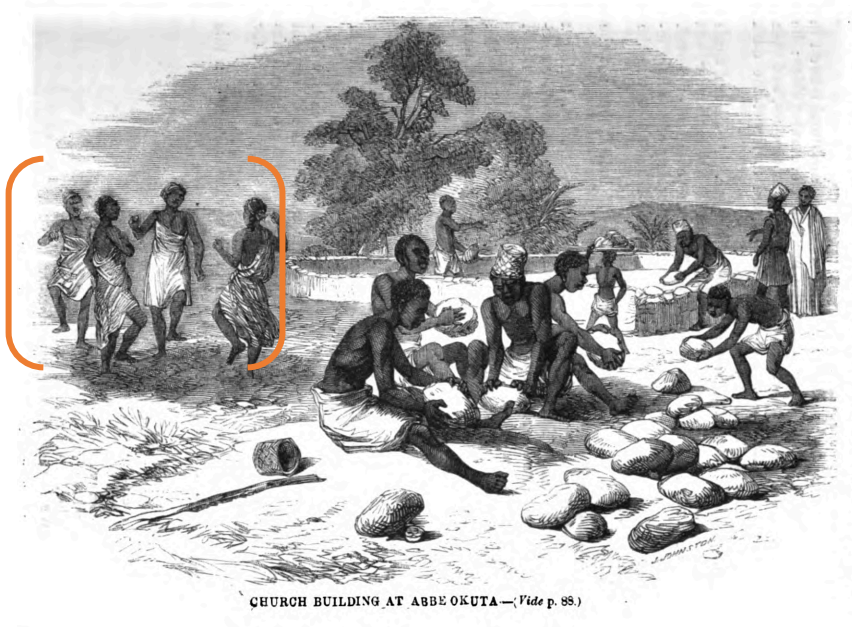


Illustration 5.15. "Church building at Abeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1859, 85.

The accompanying text emphasizes the symbolic significance of this collective labour: "Our engraving represents progress. The first buildings erected at Abbeokuta to serve as churches were of the simplest character… Then, as congregations increase, and the people are of themselves willing, let them enlarge and improve their churches… The Yoruba converts have outgrown the first unpretending structures… They are all busily occupied… 'And they came,

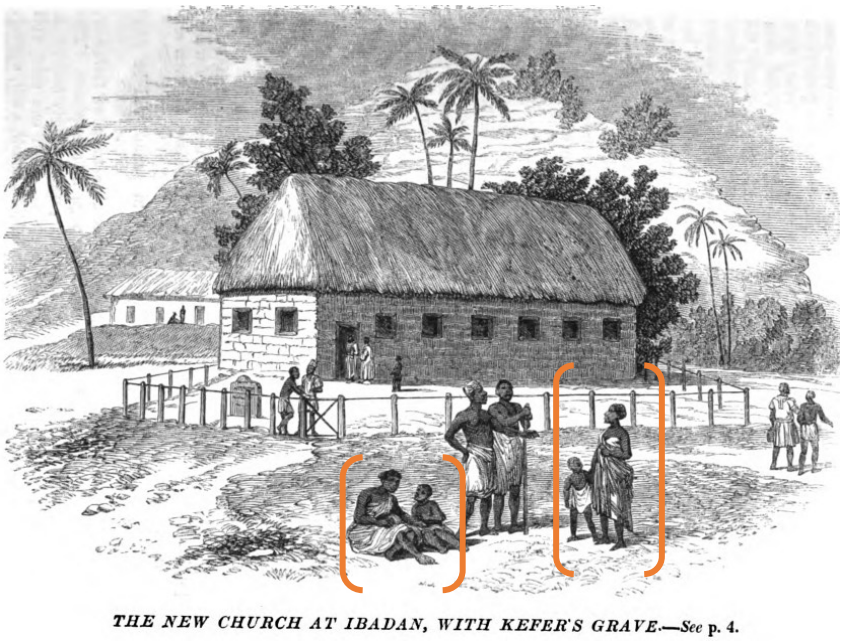
[47] In all the images related to the churches, we can identify women of different ages depicted wearing various attires. According to Byfield, women's dress in nineteenth-century Yorubaland reflected distinctions of age, marital status, and social position. Compared to men's outfits, women's clothing was simpler, mainly consisting of two or three wrappers and a headdress, lacking the detailed tailoring and embroidery often seen in men's garments. Girls started wearing the *tobi*, a knee-length apron or petticoat tied at the waist, once they reached puberty. Unmarried women usually wore a wrapper called the *irobinrin* with a small headscarf called the *idiku*, although Samuel Johnson mentioned they sometimes wore two wrappers. The typical outfit included a heavier cloth secured above the breasts and a lighter wrapper around the waist. Married women added a third cloth, the *iborun*, serving as a shawl or head and back covering. Women's attire was completed by the *gele*, a headdress made from simple cloth or more luxurious materials like velvet, while elderly women uniquely wore the *ikaleri*, a special headscarf used for carrying gifts to them. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta,* 5. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. O. Johnson (Routledge & Sons, 1921; reprinted Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 112.

both men and women, as many as were willing-hearted.'"[48] The passage describes church construction as a collective spiritual and community effort. Readers of the newspapers could see that both men and women were portrayed as actively engaged in building, emphasizing that African converts were increasingly responsible and committed to maintaining and growing their religious institutions.

Together, these images and texts present the CMS churches in Abeokuta as dynamic structures shaped through collective effort, religious development, and shifting material circumstances. Women are prominently featured throughout these scenes, serving not only as worshippers and family members but also as active participants in the social dynamics of the mission community. Meanwhile, the churches serve as physical symbols of both the missionaries' lasting presence and the strengthening of local Christianity.

The next image depicts the newly erected church in Ibadan in 1856. In the foreground, two women stand near the church, each accompanied by children, one seated on the ground and the other standing beside a man. Their clothing consists of locally produced "country cloth," similar to that worn by women in earlier representations from Badagry and Abeokuta. As in many CMS images, women are shown either caring for children or engaged in everyday domestic activities. This image was published in the *Gleaner* in 1856 and 1875, and later reproduced in the Pictorial Album, although the place name differs between the two publications. The frontispiece was a sketch by Mrs. Hinderer.[49]

[48] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1859, 88.
[49] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1856, 4, 1875, 135; *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 17.



THE NEW CHURCH AT IBADAN, WITH KEFER'S GRAVE.—*See* p. 4.

Illustration 5.16. "The New Church at Ibadan, with Kefer's grave," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1856, 1; 1875, 135. *Pictorial Album*, 17.

The 1856 *Gleaner* article reports on the difficult circumstances faced by missionaries, including Hinderer and Keefer, in 1851. It records that on May 18; a tornado destroyed the roof of the Ibadan church. Shortly afterward, Rev. Keefer died and was buried near the church, marking the first Christian burial in Ibadan. The article also notes, based on entries from Mr. Hinderer's journal, that only two missionaries served a population of approximately 70,000.[50]

The *Pictorial Album* highlights the Church at Kudeti, the oldest and central CMS station in Ibadan. In 1872, a tornado destroyed two similar churches elsewhere in the town. This was a serious challenge for the Christian community in this inland African city. Nevertheless, led by their African pastor, the congregation organized efforts to fund the reconstruction of their churches. Support came from the Bishop of Sierra Leone, the CMS Committee, and various benefactors in England. By 1874, the churches were rebuilt.[51]

[50] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1856, 4.
[51] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 17.

According to a publication in the *Gleaner* in 1875, additional funds were raised locally, supplemented by the proceeds from the sale of Mrs. Hinderer's memoir. According to Mr. Olubi's journal, two new churches were opened in June 1874 at Aremo and Ogunpa.[52] By this time, Mr. and Mrs. Hinderer were no longer in charge of the Ibadan mission, and leadership had passed to Daniel Olubi.

A distinct engraving, published in a Quarterly Paper, depicts a scene from the Ijebu country, an African district on the Bight of Benin, southwest of Egba, where missionaries were beginning to establish a presence. The accompanying text notes that the Ijebu region had long been associated with slave-trading and that, after being discouraged along the coast and in Abeokuta, traders sought refuge there.

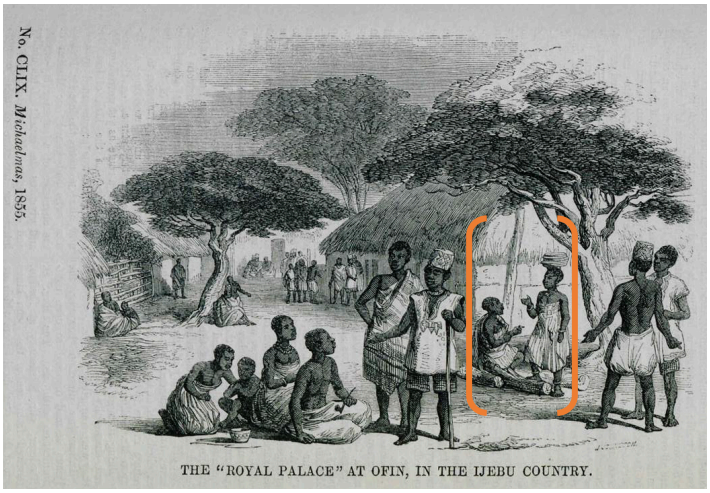


Illustration 5.17. "The 'Royal Palace'[53] at Ofin, in the Ijebu Country," *Missionary Papers*, 1855, 1.

The area was also described as deeply influenced by superstition. For example, before arriving at Ofin, the missionaries witnessed the presence of Oro, a man covered with a cloth; and

[52] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1875, 135. See also the image in *Missionary Register*, vol. 43, 1855, 447–448. As it was mentioned before the images were published in other CMS publications.
[53] From this image we cannot differentiate which structure is the royal palace and based in the description that accompanied the image the missionaries had to walk to find it. The use of quotation mark on "Royal palace" could be to highlight it, as they did in a previous image with "the book," in order to clarify or minimize that the royal palace in the Ijebu country is not like the Europeans.

during this time, women were forbidden to appear in public. The narrative explains that "while these last women may not be seen, fearful of the penalties attached to a violation of the law, they cower, trembling, and conceal themselves in nooks and corners until the noise and uproar have passed by."[54]

The engraving depicts the setting of a royal reception in Ofin, one of the Ijebu capitals and a royal residence, marking the missionaries' first entry into the town. In contrast to images from Abeokuta, Lagos, or Badagry, the Royal Palace at Ofin does not show CMS infrastructure, as this was the first approach in the territory; instead, we see a representation of the local infrastructure. In the foreground, two women sit on the ground, listening to the event, while others stand nearby, speaking with a companion and carrying an object on their heads, similar to the "plate-like" loads in other images from Abeokuta and Isein. Notably, these women are shown attending the preaching, whereas in many other missionary images, audiences are predominantly male and women appear only in the background or remain largely invisible, as we will see in images of religious gatherings.

The next engraving, "View of Isein," shows a town associated with the Niger River mission stations, with a group of figures in the foreground and the settlement extending into a mountainous, wooded landscape behind them. Among the figures, two women are clearly visible: one stands upright with a load balanced on her head, while another sits on the ground. The standing woman closely resembles other female figures depicted in CMS visual material, particularly those representing women from Abeokuta. Her posture and the object carried on her head reflect a recurring visual convention found in images presented in this research. The

[54] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1855, 2.

clothing, bodily stance, and activity together function as markers of gender difference within the image.



Illustration 5.18. "View of Isein," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1858, 25.

The *Gleaner*'s textual description places Yoruba populations primarily in fortified towns, shaped by the political instability of the region. According to the publication, "The population of the Yoruba country live in towns… surrounded by clay walls, about five feet high, and sufficiently thick to be a good defence,"[55] with ditches and gates controlling access. Within these walls lay "thousands of low, broad, grass-thatched cottages" and narrow, winding streets, except for one broad route leading from the gates to the marketplace, often shaded by large trees. This description emphasizes the density and organization of urban life, framing Yoruba towns as structured yet vulnerable spaces in need of stability.

The marketplace is presented as the central site for social interaction and economic exchange. It is described as a large, tree-shaded area with small open sheds and thatched roofs. The variety of goods for sale, including foodstuffs, livestock, textiles, weapons, and imported

[55] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1858, 25–26.

cloth, further underscores the market's role as a hub of economic activity. In the evenings, men, women, girls, travellers, farmers, and artisans gathered to buy, sell, and socialize. The text vividly portrays the sensory atmosphere of the market, remarking on the "clatter of tongues," bargaining, laughter, and quarrels; and "as the shades of night fall, if there be no moon, every woman lights her little lamp, and the market-place sparkles with numberless tiny stars."[56] Based on this narrative, women are thus positioned at the heart of commercial and social life, both as participants in trade and as visible agents in public space.[57]

The engraving represents the landscape described by Rev. H. Townsend during his visit to Isein as part of his missionary work. In his account, he states: "From the Isein hill on which we stood, the highest of the group, we saw an extensive plain to the north."[58] Followed by a series of hills and distinctive geological formations such as Oke Amo, Oke Fo, and Oke Ado, the latter likened to "a lion crouching" with its head facing south, these geographic features frame the town within a visually strategic and significant environment. Within this visual context, the image of Isein contributes to a broader missionary visual discourse in which African women are presented as essential to everyday life yet confined to specific, gendered roles within colonial representations of African society.

In the earlier image from Isein, the village is shown from a distance, allowing viewers to identify key architectural features, including the Yoruba compound. The subsequent image, published in *The Gleaner* and the *Pictorial Album*, focuses more closely on this domestic structure. Yoruba compounds are characterized by solid outer walls without windows, designed

[56] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1858, 26.
[57] According to Shields, the division of labour in Yoruba society was such that almost every task or job was linked to one of the sexes. Women played a significant role in trade, while men primarily engaged in farming. However, both genders participated in various other occupations: women, for example, were involved in weaving, spinning, dyeing, food vending, and pottery-making. Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland," 6.
[58] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1858, 26.

to protect the interior, with access provided through a single gate. In this illustration, a woman carrying her baby on her back is shown entering the compound, visually linking female presence with domestic space and everyday movement.

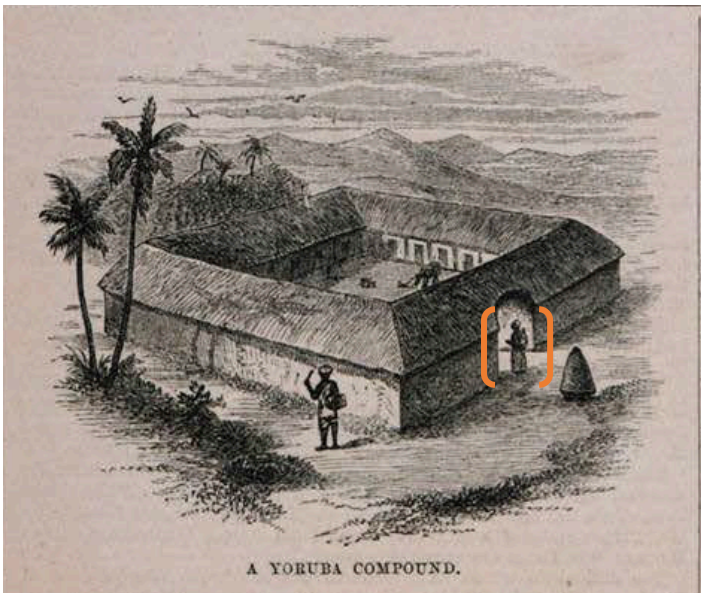


Illustration 5.19. "A Yoruba compound," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 35; *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 13.

The *Pictorial Album* emphasizes the physical appearance, building materials, and internal organization of the compound. According to its description, the walls were made of sun-dried clay, and the roof was constructed from wild grass thatch. Inside, four rows of small rooms accommodated the inhabitants. The compound contained no windows, and only one passage led to the street, which was closed at night. When fully occupied, a compound could hold between fifteen and fifty people. Outside stood an "idol house," which the Rev. Edward Roper referred to as "the temple of Satan."[59]

In the account published in the *Gleaner* under the title "What I Saw in Africa: Sketches of Missionary Life in the Yoruba Country," written by Rev. E. Roper. Describing an African

[59] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 13. Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions in West Africa*, 11.

home in Abeokuta, Roper begins not with the architecture, but with the woman positioned at the compound's entrance: "There is a native woman passing at the door. She has a little child tied on her back, with a little leg stretched over each hip. Every baby is carried in this way on its mother's back. There is a native drummer passing by the house, singing and making music, with the expectation of getting some cowries."[60] This image of the children being carried by their mothers, which appears both as an engraving and in the accompanying text, exemplifies a recurrent representation of women as mothers in CMS publications.

In the narrative, Roper then describes the internal organization of the compound using language similar to that in the *Pictorial Album*. He also explains that the piazza served multiple functions, including dining, drinking, receiving visitors, and conducting business. According to his observations, towns such as Ibadan and Abeokuta were composed of thousands of closely arranged compounds, which formed the basic spatial and social units of urban life.

The final image in this group, which represents village life, built environments, and their inhabitants, depicts the Lagos Female Institution. In *The Gleaner* of 1875, two illustrations were published showing both the former and the newly constructed buildings of the institution, where girls were receiving formal education. This is one of the few images in CMS visual material that portrays only women. It also highlights one of the principal educational buildings that the CMS established and later reconstructed to educate girls in Lagos.

[60] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 34–35.

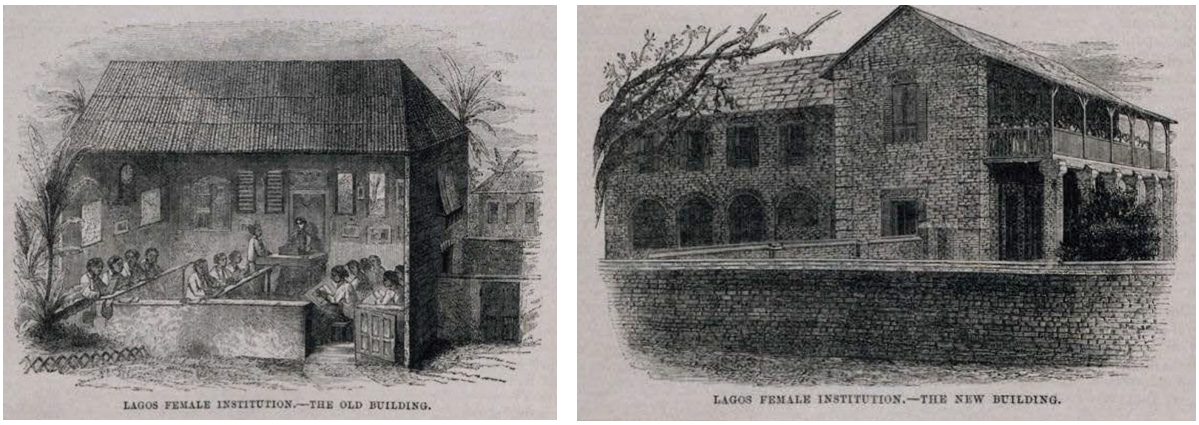


Illustration 5.20. "Lagos Female Institution, the old and new building," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1875, 119

Thanks to the efforts of Anna Hinderer and Mrs. Abigail Macaulay (daughter of Bishop Ajayi Crowther and wife of Reverend T. A. B. Macaulay), funding was secured to establish a school for older girls. The purpose of the institution was to educate these young women so they would become the future mothers and wives of already educated Africans. Enrollment in this new institution with British-style education required a fee of one quarter of a guinea, paid by the families. Classes began on 1 May 1869, with an initial enrollment of 16 students. The institution was first directed by Annie Roper and her husband; subsequently, it was overseen by Reverend Townsend and his wife, and later by Reverend Mann and his wife.[61]

Due to high demand, a new building was constructed, and students from Abeokuta, Ibadan, Badagry, and surrounding areas were admitted. The educational program sought to produce colonial subjects who were "English" in mentality and behaviour, thereby perpetuating imperial domination. Accordingly, the girls received a British education described as "a useful and good education, thoroughly English," which included drawing, singing, reading, and writing

[61] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1875, 118–119. Edward Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions in West Africa*, no. 1 (William Hunt and Company, 1869), 17.

in English, as well as sewing and cooking. They were also taught teaching skills and, for this purpose, carried out practical training with young children from nearby schools.[62]

After Mrs. Roper returned from London, she was authorized to teach the girls, and these sessions became practical training exercises. In these sessions, each young woman was assigned a class at a school while the others observed; afterward, they provided feedback to the student responsible for the lesson, allowing all participants to help improve their instruction. These young women could apply this knowledge both as teachers and as mothers, since the primary objective of their education was to prepare them to become wives of locally educated African men or of teachers. At the same time, they were also expected to teach British education to their future children or to pupils in mission schools. This process relegated maternal languages and local forms of knowledge to a secondary position. The English language became the sole gateway to "legitimate knowledge," silencing other narratives and ways of understanding the world.[63]

According to a report in *The Gleaner* from 1875, based on Annie Roper's account the institution had 49 students, 16 of whom had come from outside Lagos. Students from outside Lagos had the opportunity to live on the premises, so they would have sewn their own clothes, ironed them, done the laundry, and cleaned their rooms. The previous images illustrate the building's evolution, with one showing the earlier structure and the other the later one. It can be

[62] See appendix F, G and H. CA2O66 Rev. Adolphus Christian Mann, 93.
[63] However, some missionaries made attempts to use local languages in their schools and to translate the Bible into Yoruba (Crowther), which was published in 1850. Kwabena Dei Ofori-Attah, "The British and Curriculum Development in West Africa: A Historical Discourse," *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschriftfür Erziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale de l'Education* 52, no. 5 (2006), 414–415. Magnus O. Bassey, "Missionary Rivalry and Educational Expansion in Southern Nigeria, 1885–1932," The *Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 1 (1991): 36–46. Misty L. Bastian, "Young Converts: Christian Missions, Gender and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria 1880–1929," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2000): 145–158, https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2000.0001

observed that the "new building" was larger and provided more space to accommodate more students.[64]

2. Movement (people travelling, flight, or moving out/in):

During this period, the region faced frequent warfare among territories inhabited by the Egba and nearby populations. Conflicts emerged both between states and as defensive reactions to external threats. These events caused considerable instability for local residents, often leading to mass migrations in which entire communities abandoned their villages and towns in search of safety, which in turn heightened competition for resources. Such conditions created opportunities for individuals to build wealth and gain influence as military leaders, warriors, and traders. Moreover, slaves were captured to meet the demands of coastal trade and to achieve economic and political goals. Under these circumstances, people embarked on long-distance journeys for trade, survival, or missionary activities.[65]

The following group of images presents four situations occurring in Abeokuta, Lagos, and Ibadan that illustrate these dynamics. Together, they help to contextualize the conditions under which missionaries arrived and began moving through the region, while also demonstrating how political conflict and economic activities shaped the internal strategies and decisions of the missions operating in these territories.

The history of Abeokuta was closely linked to the collapse of the so-called Yoruba kingdom during the "era of confusion" and the return of the Egba people who had been liberated

[64] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1875, 118–119. CA2O81 Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions in West Africa*, 16, 29–31.
[65] Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Adeniyi Oroge, "The Institution of Slavery in Yorubaland with special reference to the 19th Century" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1971). Saburi Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours 1842-1872* (Clarendon Press, 1957).

in Sierra Leone, as we discussed earlier.[66] Their resettlement in the region was presented as a process of renewal, bringing "the elements of improvement" and preparing the ground for the establishment of a Christian mission.[67] CMS publications described this development as a hopeful moment, promising "better days for Africa" and signalling the growing importance of Abeokuta as a centre of missionary activity.[68]

However, as part of the missionaries' narrative, the town's rising influence also provoked hostility from King Gezo of Dahomey, who viewed Abeokuta as a rival power that threatened his military campaigns and slave-trading interests. According to the *Gleaner*, the king and his people regarded the town "with increasing jealousy," seeing it as an obstacle to their "bloody wars and slave-trading pursuits."[69] Despite attempts by the British Consul of the Bights of Benin and Biafra, Mr. Beecroft, to dissuade Gezo from attacking the Egbas, these efforts proved unsuccessful.[70] However, he managed to contact the people in Abeokuta to warn them of the attack. In March, Dahomean forces launched an assault on Abeokuta.[71] The newspaper reported that Gezo's soldiers, "male and female, fought ferociously, but in vain; until at length, finding themselves baffled in every effort, they were compelled slowly and sullenly to retire, leaving

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[66] J. D.Y. Peel, *Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba* (Indiana University Press, 2000), 48.
[67] Ajayi, J.F. *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Longman, 1965). Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The Sierra Leonians in Yoruba 1830–1890* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 50–51.
[68] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1851, 194.
[69] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1851, 194.
[70] In Dahomey, Beecroft explained to Ghezo the benefits of legitimate commerce over the slave trade. The demand for palm oil and cotton was growing in Europe. Beecroft offered a £3,000 annual subsidy for three years, in sterling or goods, to offset economic loss, and warned Ghezo against raiding the Yoruba and the Popo, British allies protected by the government. Despite British efforts to suppress the slave trade and the Dahomean menace, the King declined the offer. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours,* 39–41.
F O 84/816, Beecroft to Palmerston, 22 July 1850.
[71] Roper described this attack as "Satan's attempt to destroy the Christians, by destroying their town, failed signally." Despite the Dahomean attacks, the occupation by the missionaries of the towns of Lagos, Otta, Ijaye and Ibadan happened in the next years, and by 1855 there were 3 African clergymen, 28 African teachers, 536 communicants and 775 children at the schools of the Yoruba country. Roper, *Facts about Foreign Missions in West Africa*, 20.

1200 of their number dead upon the field of battle, beside many prisoners in the hands of the Egbas."[72] During their retreat, they reportedly attacked people they had captured while farming.

The *Gleaner*'s frontispiece for August 1851 sought to visually represent this moment of crisis. The editors explained: "We have endeavoured to represent this scene in our Frontispiece," referring to the Dahomean attack and the defence of Abeokuta.[73] The associated text describes how, while the battle raged on one side of the town, "the women and children, fearful lest the enemy might prevail, were hurrying forth, weeping as they went, with some few men among them, to hide themselves in the woods from the tyrant's cruelty,"[74] precisely what is captured in the next image.

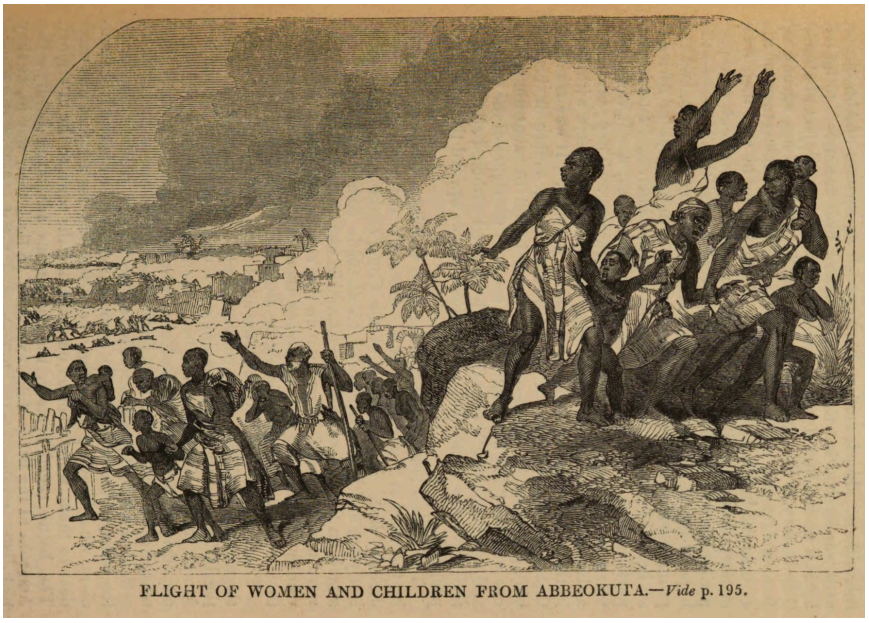

Illustration 5.21. "Flight of women and children from Abeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1851, 193.

[72] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1851, 195.
[73] During this attack, some converts and Christian agents, including Doherty and Dasalu, as well as women like Maria Yesomina and Sarah Bonetta, were captured. Their stories are discussed in the previous chapter. According to Doherty's account and Gollmer's reflection, "The Church Missionary Society has lost Mr. William Doherty, a most valuable native agent, with about seventeen souls, men, women and children, connected with the church. (…) Fortunately, the schoolmaster, his family, some schoolchildren, and church, were still at Abeokuta for refuge." Charles A. Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 175. A2 O35 Samuel W. Doherty, "A story of the time of my father's captivity," no. 7. "Epitome of Missionary News," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1875, 36.
[74] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1851, 195.

The engraving captures the forced flight of the civilian population, emphasizing that most of those fleeing were women and children, while the men remained behind to defend the town. The figures are shown in motion, their gestures and expressions conveying fear, desperation, and sorrow as they attempt to escape violence and captivity. Through this visual narrative, women are portrayed not as passive observers but as vulnerable yet active participants in moments of political and military crisis. Their flight underscores both the gendered impact of warfare and the central role of women in the survival of families and communities during periods of conflict.

According to Biobaku, Consul Beecroft was authorized to supply arms, and Missionary Henry Townsend distributed British-supplied ammunition to Egba military leaders. The Dahomeans, advised by people from Ishagga, focused the attack on the western Aro Gate, recently fortified by Egba chiefs supporting missionary efforts. The battle came at a high cost for both sides, though Dahomean casualties were heavier, particularly among the Amazons. Women participated actively on both sides: the Dahomean Amazons, an elite female combat unit, led the assault, while Egba women in Abeokuta tended the wounded and supplied food and water to soldiers at the front.[75]

The next image is the frontispiece from the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, which represents the journey of Rev. D. Hinderer to Ibadan. The engraving was based on a sketch sent to the newspaper by Mr. G. Townsend of Exeter, in accordance with the description provided by Rev. S. Crowther.

[75] Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours,* 44–45.

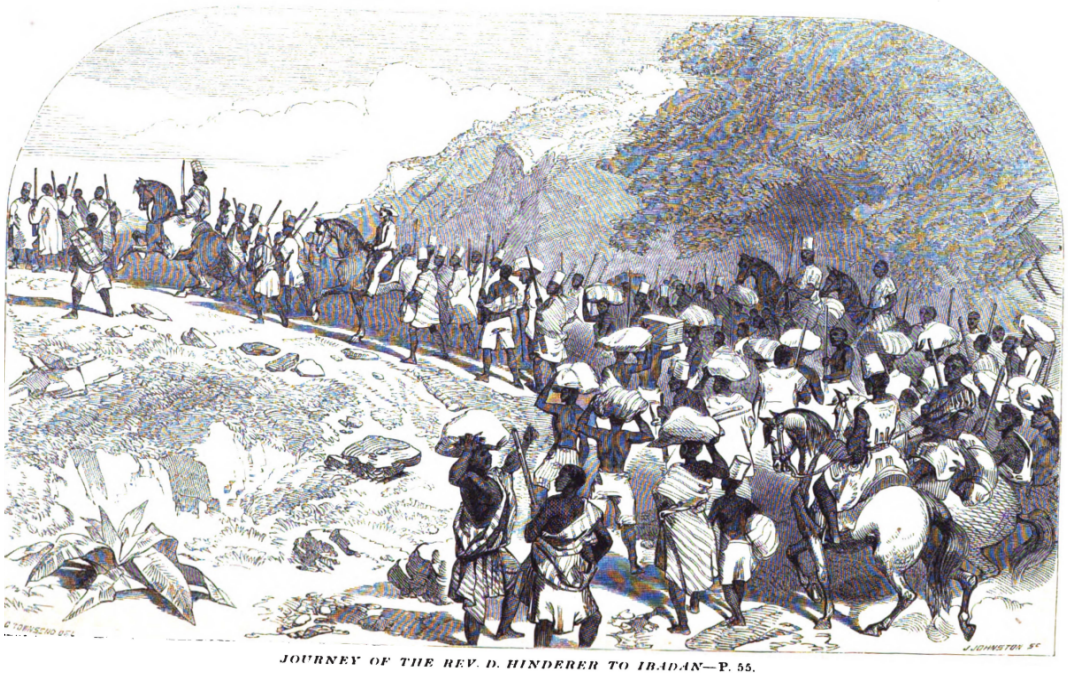

Illustration 5.22. "Journey of the Rev. D. Hinderer to Ibadan," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1852, 50.

The accompanying narrative describes Hinderer's movement into the interior and the difficulties encountered on the route to Ibadan. On May 16, he departed from Abeokuta, "with many a regretful feeling at leaving his promising work at Osielle," although it was left in the care of an African Teacher.[76] As a formal support of his mission, two messengers from the chief Sagbua and two from Sokenu accompanied him. At Atade, six hours east of Abeokuta, Hinderer joined a caravan of approximately 4,000 people, described as consisting of "rough soldiers and impatient traders," all travelling toward Ibadan.

The engraving visually represents this caravan: people walking and riding on horseback, soldiers and traders moving alongside groups of travellers, and individuals carrying goods on their heads. Women are visible at the front of the image, identifiable by their loads and dress, which resemble the clothing shown in earlier images. The scene emphasizes the collective nature

[76] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1852, 55.

of inland travel, combining military, commercial, and missionary mobility.[77] The women appear neither as missionaries nor as decision-makers, but as essential participants in the logistical and domestic dimensions of travel. This visual framing reinforces a gendered hierarchy of mobility in which women's contributions are normalized as part of everyday labour, while male movement is linked to exploration, trade, and evangelization.

> Hinderer's journal records the hardships of the journey in vivid detail:
> May 18—We started about eight o'clock a.m., and travelling at a quick pace, and halting only once, we arrived at another resting-place called Otere, in the heart of the bush, at about two o'clock… At the entrance of our resting-place the soldiers conducting, or pretending to conduct, the caravan, have a sort of turnpike, where they exact money from the traders… until late in the night, the forest echoed with the dreadful noise they made; and, several times during the evening, fighting threatened to break out among them… We had scarcely fixed our tent, and the people constructed their huts, when we were visited by a heavy tornado.[78]

The journey continued under difficult conditions, with paths described as zig-zagging through bush and forest. At one point, the soldiers refused to proceed further, forcing the group to camp again in the wilderness. Hinderer illustrated the presence of "majestic forest, with noble and gigantic trees,"[79] particularly the cotton tree and the struggles to find water and travelling in near darkness without fire or light.

Beyond documenting physical hardship, Hinderer's account also reflects the journey's broader objectives. After spending approximately three months in Ibadan, he returned to Abeokuta and summarized the town's strategic value for missionary work. He described Ibadan as well positioned to reach surrounding regions: northward toward Ijaye, Ago, and Ogbomoso; eastward toward Ife, regarded as a major centre of idolatry; and southward toward Ijebu, Lagos,

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[77] Caravans operated on a set timetable aligned with market days in key towns. This system allowed traders to buy and sell both along the route and at its endpoints. Often, local political authorities provided protection for the caravans and earned revenue through trade and tolls. McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change*, 38. Shields, Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland (South-Western Nigeria).
[78] *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1852, 55.
[79] *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1852, 56.

and Benin, where slave trading remained active. He also noted linguistic diversity and the particular use of Hausa and Fulani in Ilorin.[80]

The frontispiece and its accompanying narrative thus present the missionary journey as both a physical and a spiritual expedition, providing readers of the *Intelligencer* with far more detail than other newspapers about the hardships they faced in establishing the missions. The visual emphasis on caravans, soldiers, traders, and women carrying goods situates the missionary movement within broader networks of commerce, warfare, and regional mobility. At the same time, Hinderer's reflections frame Ibadan as a strategic base for extending Christian influence across Yoruba and neighbouring territories.[81]

The next engraving, "Scenery on the route from Lagos to Abeokuta," a sketch by Dr. Irving and reproduced in the June number of the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, depicts a section of the route from Lagos to Abeokuta, characterized by dense vegetation, narrow paths, and towering cotton trees with buttressed bases.[82]

[80] *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1852, 57–58. Anna Hinderer, S*eventeen Years in the Yoruba Country. Memorials of Anna Hinderer, wife of the Rev. David Hinderer, C. M. S. Missionary in Western Africa* (Piccadilly The religious Track Society, 1872).
[81] Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*. J.F. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Longman, 1965).
[82] *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1853, 189.



Illustration 5.23. "Scenery on the route from Lagos to Abbeokuta," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1853, 170; *Church Missionary Papers*, 1861, 1.

In this scene of travel between Lagos and Abeokuta, women are again identifiable by the loads they carry on their heads, marking their role in sustaining mobility through physical labour. They are not only carrying goods and provisions, but also their children. The surrounding landscape illustrates the typical scenery encountered along much of this route. The terrain is described as alternating between long grasslands and orchard-like tracts of trees, with cotton trees dominating the forested areas. Women's presence is tied to endurance, transport, and domestic responsibility within the broader networks of travel, trade, and missionary expansion.[83]

The same image was published in the *Missionary Papers,* but with a different title, "Travelling in the African Bush," and it also emphasizes the physical challenges of travel in this region, contrasting African journeys with the ease of transportation in England. The absence of

[83] CMS, CA2 OS6 SO. In Samuel Johnson's Report of a Journey from Lagos to Abeokuta, 21st March 1877, he wrote about the large proportion of women in the carrying trade in 1877, "… I must confess that this went against my own sense of respect for their sex (...) to follow services that try the energy of their feeble sex." Shields argues that Johnson fails to acknowledge either the economic independence that such employment provided women or the fact that these women were so skilled at head porterage that they often had no trouble carrying the heaviest loads. Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland (South-Western Nigeria)," 21.

roads, carts, and carriages meant that "all goods must be carried on men's heads," while the narrow, muddy paths often made even the use of a pony difficult.[84] Beyond the natural obstacles, travellers also faced threats from armed groups, sometimes motivated by slave traders, who lay in wait to kidnap or kill foot-travellers. As the text notes, during such times "the highways are unoccupied, and the travellers walk through bye-ways," and each journey was undertaken "at great peril to life and limb."[85]

As the previous image and its description acknowledge the difficulties people experienced on their way to other towns, the next image provides a similarly vivid account of travel in the Yoruba country, emphasizing the narrowness of the paths and the necessity of moving in Indian file. But in this case, emphasis is placed on the travellers encountered: "numbers of men, women, and children" heading to market with palm oil, corn, yams, and fowls, each carrying heavy loads on their heads according to local custom.[86] The route passed through woods and prairies, with tall grass brushing against the traveller, occasional cultivated plots of cassava and Indian corn, and dense forests where roots crossed the path and vegetation grew thick and wild.

[84] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1861, 1.
[85] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1861, 1.
[86] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1865, 61.



Illustration 5.24. "Travelling in the Yoruba Country," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, June 1865, 61.

The engraving titled "Travelling in the Yoruba Country" depicts a group of travellers moving through an irregular landscape, characterized by rocky paths, dense vegetation, and abrupt terrain. The figures advance in single file, carrying goods, personal belongings, and, in one case, a covered hammock transporting an individual. The women's presence in the caravan underscores their essential role in sustaining long-distance travel through physical labour.[87]

Based on *The Gleaner*, the landscape is described as "Tall trees, cotton trees and others, raise their enormous white trunks above the dark underwood, from their branches being suspended masses of leaves, or trailing plants, like cables or cordage, and as thick as an arm or leg; while close to the earth spring up, in all directions, numerous slender saplings, thus

[87] Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland."

rendering the bush all but impervious."[88] The path sometimes formed a tunnel beneath the foliage, offering welcome shade from the intense sun.

The publication also adds a description of Abeokuta, noting that as you get closer, the cultivated land becomes more prominent, with orderly fields of Indian corn, cotton, yams, and French beans. The road widens, and roadside sheds appear where pito (native beer) and palm wine are sold. The first view of Abeokuta is described as remarkable, with large granite formations rising dramatically from the plain, while glimpses of the town's extensive native dwellings appear beneath the rocky outcrops.[89]

The urban landscape of Abeokuta is characterized by narrow, irregular streets and mud houses with tall, thatched roofs forming hollow squares around family courts. These compounds accommodated extended families, often including multiple wives and children. The rooms were dark and windowless to block the sun's glare, with a single entrance protected by suspended charms, as shown in the aforementioned images.[90]

One of the most distinctive features of Abbeokuta was its markets, where "the women, who are the chief traffickers, noisily ply their trade."[91] A wide range of goods was available, including foodstuffs such as obbe or palaber sauce, kankie or maize cakes, cassava, ground beans, dried rats, snails, shea butter, nuts, tobacco, eggs, palm wine, and fruits, as well as hardware like knives, cutlasses, needles, and hoes. Dry goods included country cloths, cottons, Hausa caps, threads, leatherwork, saddles, cushions, and finely crafted earthenware, gourds, and calabashes.[92]

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[88] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1865, 61.
[89] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1865, 62.
[90] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1865, 62.
[91] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1865, 62.
[92] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1865, 62–63. Markets occupied an important place in nineteenth-century Yoruba society as centers of commerce and social gathering. T. J. Bowen described the Iseyin marketplace as a spacious area, not a building, shaded by trees and occasionally dotted with open sheds featuring low thatched roofs on simple

These textual and visual representations construct a detailed picture of mobility, landscape, and daily life in the Yoruba country. They emphasize the acknowledged dangers and physical demands of travel, the terrain's ecological richness, and the central role of women in sustaining commercial and social exchange through market activity and the transport of goods.

3. Religious or social gatherings and meetings, including local or Christian traditions

The images examined in this section depict religious and social gatherings central to the establishment and consolidation of CMS missions in West Africa. Visual and textual representations emphasize encounters between missionaries and local political authorities, presenting royal approval, public preaching, and ceremonial meetings as essential steps in missionary expansion. While these scenes foreground male missionaries and rulers, women appear in these representations, especially in engravings depicting women's gatherings. A small number of group photographs and portraits, particularly from the 1880s, offer rare visual evidence of missionary wives, female teachers, and African women within Christian communities.

These illustrations reveal how women were incorporated into missionary spaces, often positioned at the margins of group compositions (as reviewed in the previous sections), yet clearly present as part of the social and religious fabric of mission life, as discussed in previous chapters. Collectively, the images in this section demonstrate how gender shaped visibility and recognition within CMS representations of religious and social gatherings, reinforcing male-centred narratives while offering limited but significant glimpses of women's roles within Christian communities.

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posts. Because they attracted large numbers of people, markets also served as key sites for Christian preaching during this period. McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change*, 27–28.

3.1. Meetings between Local Chiefs/kings and Christian missionaries

In the CMS publications, numerous images document encounters between missionaries and local political authorities, as well as public preaching before chiefs and community members. These visual and textual records underscore the importance of securing royal approval as a prerequisite for missionary activity. This section presents two representative cases: the meeting between Revs. Townsend and Mann with King Atiba of Ago in the Yoruba country, and the encounter between Dr. Irving and Ref. Hinderer with the King of Ofin in the Ijebu region. Both episodes illustrate how missionary expansion relied on formal diplomatic receptions, public ceremonies, and negotiations with local rulers to establish a Christian presence.

The Reception of Rev. H. and Mrs. Townsend by King Atiba is one of the most prominent examples of such encounters, with Rev. A. Mann accompanying Rev. Townsend on one of his itinerant journeys into the interior. According to the Pictorial Album, the missionaries visited Oyo, the royal capital, at the king's invitation, and a mission was subsequently established there.[93]

[93] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 17.



Illustration 5.25. "Reception of the Rev. H. Townsend and Mrs. Townsend, and the Rev. A. Mann, by Atiba, King of Yoruba, at Ago, the Royal town," *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1856, 22, *Pictorial Album*, 17.

The accompanying engraving depicts a large public gathering in which the missionaries are formally received by the king and his court. The crowd is composed primarily of men, while women appear mainly at the periphery of the scene. Their presence is visually marked by distinctive dress, posture, and by the fact that some are carrying infants. This spatial positioning reflects gendered divisions within public ceremonial life, where women are present as observers and caretakers rather than as central participants in political or religious negotiations.

Further details of this reception are provided in Rev. Townsend's journal, published in the *Church Missionary Record* (July 1854) and then in the *Intelligencer* and *Pictorial Album*. On 28 September 1853, Townsend and Mann were received "in great state" at Ago, King Atiba's

royal town, and he describes the landscape like "Within the gate is a large open yard, at the upper end of which is the royal residence, having six pyramidical projections from the roof and house, called *koki*, under one of which his majesty was seated on a chair of ample size. The posts of the *koki* were covered with scarlet cloth and hangings."[94]

Based on the description and the image, the king was seated beneath a *koki*, a roofed structure with pyramidal projections, while his wives and children sat on a carpet spread before him. And then, "On approaching, we had to wait at the further extremity, while some nine or ten old men made their prostrations, rolling in the dirt. This, I suppose, was arranged to impress us with a notion of the great dignity and honour of the Yoruba monarch."[95] Around them stood attendants with ceremonial umbrellas, trumpeters, and elderly men performing ritual prostrations to emphasize royal authority.

Mrs. Townsend attracted particular attention from the court, being "greatly admired," despite the missionaries' modest attire. The king himself remained partially concealed by his elaborate robes and headgear, reinforcing the performative distance between ruler and visitors. After a formal exchange of compliments, the missionaries were dismissed with gifts of 20,000 cowries and a young bullock. This reception, represented in the frontispiece, underscores the ceremonial and hierarchical nature of missionary diplomacy and the central role of royal patronage in facilitating Christian outreach. It is also from a drawing by Mr. G. Townsend, Exeter, made under the immediate eye of the Rev. H. Townsend.

A second example of missionary and royal interaction appears in the *Intelligencer* in 1856, depicting Dr. Irving and Mr. Hinderer meeting with the King of Ofin in the Ijebu country.

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[94] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1856, 22.
[95] *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1856, 22.

The drawing was made by Dr. Irving himself before his death and later engraved for publication.[96]

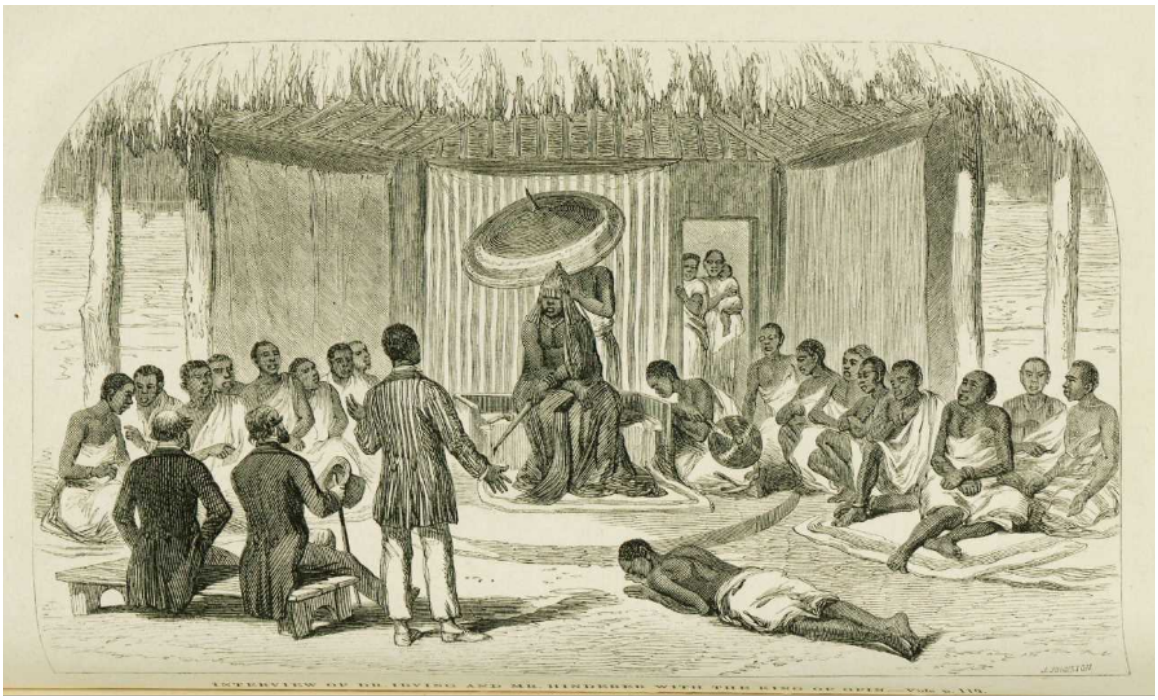

Illustration 5.26. "Interview of Dr. Irving and Mr. Hinderer with the King of Ofin," *Intelligencer,* 1856, 98

In this image, the missionaries are positioned in front of the king and are dressed differently from the surrounding people. As in the previous illustration, a man is shown performing a prostration before the king, emphasizing the hierarchical nature of the encounter. In the background, two women can be identified within a predominantly male audience. One of them is carrying a child, reinforcing the recurring visual association of women with caregiving and maternal roles. Their marginal placement within the scene reflects women's limited visibility in formal political and religious encounters, even though they were present as members of the wider community.

[96] *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1856, 119.

Irving's journal notes describe the journey through fortified gates, banana groves, cultivated fields, and market areas before reaching Ofin. Notably, he records the impact of the Oro cult on women's mobility. When Oro was "out," women were forbidden to appear in public, forcing them to hide indoors. Irving contrasts this with Abeokuta, where Oro's presence silenced women's voices and street commerce, leaving public space dominated by men.[97] This passage highlights how religious practices restricted women's visibility and participation in public life, shaping the gendered landscape that missionaries encountered.

The publication explains that Irving's journey was significant for promoting peace between the Egbas and the Ijebus and for establishing a Christian presence at Ofin. However, the mission remained vulnerable. Irving's sudden death prevented him from completing his narrative, and the post was left vacant for a time. Only later did the Rev. Samuel Crowther return to re-establish contact with the community.[98]

Across both cases, women appear primarily at the margins of political and missionary encounters. They are depicted as members of royal households, caregivers, or silent observers, rather than as active participants in negotiations or religious discussions. In the reception of King Atiba, the king's wives and children are seated ceremonially before him, reinforcing domestic and symbolic roles. In the Ofin scene, women are present but visually subordinate, with one defined primarily through motherhood.

These representations reflect the gendered assumptions of both local political culture and missionary visual discourse. While women were integral to family life, economic activity, and religious practice, their public visibility in formal encounters between missionaries and chiefs remained limited. The CMS images thus reproduce a hierarchy in which male authority, both

[97] *Church Missionary Intelligencer,* 1856, 118–119. Peel, 217.
[98] *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, 1856, 119. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, 60–66.

African and European, dominates the visual and narrative space, while women's roles are confined to the domestic, peripheral, and symbolic domains.

3.2 Groups of Missionaries: photographs and portraits of female 'missionaries.'

In CMS publications and archival sources, the contributions of women within missionary contexts are far less visible than those of male missionaries. Their work, particularly in education, domestic management, and female instruction, was rarely foregrounded in institutional narratives. However, photographic and illustrated materials from the 1880s provide rare visual evidence of missionary wives, female teachers, and African women participating in Christian educational and religious life. The next three group photos from *The Gleaner* allow us to examine how women were positioned within missionary communities and how gender shaped both representation and recognition.[99]

The photograph reproduced in *The Gleaner* 1880[100] depicts the Sunday-school teachers of Breadfruit Church, taken five or six years prior to publication, when the Rev. L. Nicholson was in charge. Mr. and Mrs. Nicholson appear prominently at the centre of the group, emphasizing the couple's leadership role within the mission. The image commemorates the centenary of Sunday schools and reflects the shift in emphasis toward pastoral rather than purely evangelistic work.[101]

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[99] Photography in Nigeria began in the late 1880s, with Lagos opening its first professional studios by 1880. Walwin Holm, the first African studio owner, was in Lagos. Many early studios were set up by Sierra Leoneans, Liberians, and Brazilians, mostly freed slaves or their descendants. Missionaries also took numerous photos during their work, capturing church life and clerical attire. While not meant as history, these images now serve as valuable sources for Nigerian church history. Nimis states that missionary photos reveal insights about the missionaries and the people they photographed. Erika Nimis, *Photographes de Bamako* (Editions Revue Noire, 1998). Erika Nimis, *Photographes d'Afrique de Ouest, L experience Yoruba (*KARTHALA-IFRA, 2005), 7–8. Ohioma I. Pogoson and Abiodun O. Akande, "Photography: A tool for historical records in Nigeria," *Abibisem: Journal of African Culture and Civilization* 5 (2012) & 6 (2013).

[100] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1880, 79.

[101] Clothing became an important marker of religious and cultural identity within missionary communities. For R. H. Stone, the American Baptist minister, "the adoption of European clothes did more than identify one as a convert; it



Illustration 5.27. "Sunday School teachers at Breadfruit Church, Lagos," *The Church Missionary The* , 1880, 79.

Sunday schools in West Africa were described in the publication as highly popular institutions, characterized by strong participation from African congregations and the presence of African clergy and voluntary teachers. In Sierra Leone, Sunday schools were taught by African instructors, including students from Fourah Bay College and young women from the Annie Walsh Institution. Rev. Nicholas J. Cole's 1878 report from Trinity Church, Kissy Road, recorded 306 scholars, 101 of whom were adults, with an average attendance of 263, even during the heavy rainfall of August and September.[102]

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helped demarcate the boundary between 'the civilized' and the 'uncivilized'." This perception illustrates how missionaries linked European dress to Christian conversion and ideas of civilization. However, adopting European clothing could also create tensions within local communities. When William Marsh, a Yoruba catechist of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), returned to Abeokuta and reunited with his family, his European attire drew considerable attention. According to Marsh, "My family begged me hard to put off my dress and not make myself a laughing stock." Rejecting their request, he responded, "I am not come to learn your custom," underscoring the symbolic significance of clothing as an expression of his new Christian identity and the cultural distinctions that conversion could produce. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta*, 7.

[102] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1880, 79.

The adult participation was a notable feature across the African Sunday schools in the Yoruba Mission. Based on Rev. James Johnson's reports from Abeokuta, 68 of 122 scholars at Ikija station were adults, while 75 of 100 at Oshielle were adults. In Ibadan, nearly the entire church attended Sunday school, where *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Yoruba was read alongside the Bible, a translation credited to Mr. Hinderer. A report from Lagos by the Archdeacon Henry Johnson described the diverse composition of St. Paul's Church Sunday school at Breadfruit Station. The institution included classes for small boys, girls, infants, English-speaking young men educated at Fourah Bay College, and elderly men and women studying the Bible in Yoruba. Particularly striking were the elderly women who, although unable to read, had memorized large portions of texts and chapters from the Scriptures. For example, "They are especially fond of the 23rd Psalm, and will go through it in a sing-song tone like the Mohammedans chanting the Suras of the Koran."[103]

The next image from the *Pictorial Album* further contextualizes missionary activity in Lagos and Sierra Leone, led by Revs. S. W. Darwin Fox (with Mrs. Fox), and the Rev. F.W. Dodd, of the Church Parochial Mission Society, went to West Africa in November 1885. Their aim was to revitalize the religious commitment of non-Christians and benefit all African Christians in Sierra Leone and Lagos.[104] In West Africa, there were approximately 3,000 African Christians, distributed among four or five parishes, all with African clergy except Christ Church, which was still worked by C.M.S. missionaries. The Lagos Mission was held in December 1885 and the Sierra Leone Mission in January 1886, with a series of services and meetings intended to strengthen Christian practice among African congregations. At the bottom of the image are the

[103] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1880, 79.
[104] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album,* 20.

names of the participants in the Lagos mission. With the particularity that Mrs. Ingham and Mrs. Darwin Fox were part of it and appear in the image in the second line, behind their husbands.



Illustration 5.28. "A Mission at Lagos," *The Gleaner Pictorial Album,* 20.

A later group portrait published in October 1888 in *The Gleaner* depicts several missionaries and female workers in Lagos. The three missionaries standing at the back are Rev. T. Harding, Rev. J. Vernall, and Rev. J. B. Wood; the three women are Miss Kruse, Mrs. Dickinson, and Miss Kendall. In the foreground stand the late Rev. J. W. Dickinson and Rev. J. Brayne. The image accompanied Rev. W. Allan's article "My Visit to West Africa," which highlights the collaborative nature of missionary work, including the Female Institution led by Misses Kruse and Kendall, and the Training Institution for Schoolmasters overseen by Mr. and Mrs. Dickinson.[105]

[105] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1888, 154.



Illustration 5.29. "A group of C.M.S Missionaries at Lagos," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1888, 153.

Allan's account emphasizes his extensive responsibilities as Vicar of St. James's, Bermondsey, in his visit to Lagos, ranging from institutional inspections and educational visits to meetings with missionaries from other societies, African church leaders, colonial authorities, and Muslim elites. He also comments on the moral tone of Yoruba Christians, particularly their growing opposition to polygamy, but the need to continue working on questioning slavery.[106] In addition, he addressed that in his limited visits to Sunday schools, he was especially impressed by St. Peter's, Faji, where over 200 individuals of all ages, including a class of about twenty "heathen" men and women, were under instruction and preparing for baptism.[107]

In general, in these group portraits, such as the Breadfruit Church Sunday-school teachers and the Lagos missionary photographs, women appear as identifiable and respected participants. European women are visually associated with female education as schoolmistresses, especially through institutions such as the Female Institution, while African women appear as students, teachers, and devoted congregants, as discussed in previous chapters. Their inclusion reflects the

[106] Lambeth Palace Archive. LC34. no.2. Letters addressing questions related to regulations about polygamy and marriage from C. Gollmer and Crowther to Bishop of Exeter.
[107] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1888, 154.

growing importance of women's education within missionary strategy, particularly as a means of shaping Christian family life and moral conduct.

At the same time, gender hierarchies remain evident. Men, especially clergy, are typically positioned at the centre or foreground of images, visually reinforcing their authority. Women, whether European or African, are more often shown in supportive, instructional, or nurturing roles. African women, in particular, are frequently represented in terms of their religious devotion rather than their leadership, such as elderly women reciting Scripture or female converts preparing for baptism.

The emphasis on female literacy, moral instruction, and domestic reform highlights how missionary gender ideology framed women as key agents of Christianization within the household and community. Through education, religious instruction, and institutional work, women, both African and European, played a central role in shaping Christian communities in West Africa, even when their contributions were not fully recognized in written records.

Although women's labour was essential to the functioning of missionary enterprises, particularly in education, domestic organization, and female instruction, their contributions were often subsumed under male leadership in both textual narratives and visual representations, including photographs and engravings. Among all the images recovered from the four CMS publications examined in this study, only three individual female portraits appear: the first depicts a European missionary's wife, the second an African-Christian woman, and the third the mother of an African bishop. The first two are presented in this section, while the third will be discussed in the section devoted to motherhood.

Mrs. Anna Hinderer is the only woman explicitly recognized in both the *Gleaner* and the *Pictorial Album*. Her portrait represents not only the wives of the many missionaries who served

in West Africa, but also the often-overlooked female labourers whose work was central to missionary life. The following portrait of Mrs. Hinderer depicts her as she looked approximately thirty years past to the publication in which it appeared.



Illustration 5.30. "The late Mrs. Anna Hinderer," *Pictorial Album*, 17; *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1889, 121.

The *Pictorial Album* and the *Gleaner* (1889) present a portrait with a text that situates her life within the broader missionary career of her husband, the Rev. David Hinderer, while also recognizing her own long-standing commitment to missionary work.[108] The life of Mrs. Hinderer was known to contemporary readers through her memoir, published by the Religious Tract Society. As a result, the *Gleaner* notes that little further detail was required concerning her missionary career. Her early years were shaped by a strong religious environment at the Lowestoft Vicarage, where she lived with the Rev. Francis and Mrs. Cunningham and developed

[108] Mr. Hinderer was a native of Württemberg and received his early missionary training at the Basel Missionary Training Institution, from which many devoted missionaries had been sent into the field. He later entered the Church Missionary Society's College at Islington in 1846 and was ordained in 1848. In 1849, he was appointed to Abeokuta as part of the Yoruba Mission. His work became most closely associated with the mission at Ibadan, which he founded and where he laboured for several years. During this period, both he and his wife endured extreme isolation and danger due to the region's internecine conflicts. The *Gleaner* describes their sixteen years of service in this part of the field as an exceptional example of missionary courage and devotion. After twenty-eight years of service, Mr. Hinderer returned to England in 1877 and later resided in Germany. *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1889, 121. Hinderer, S*eventeen Years in the Yoruba Country.*

an early commitment to missionary work. Her prayer to be guided into the mission field was fulfilled through her marriage to Mr. Hinderer, after which she spent seventeen years engaged in what the publication describes as "noble efforts" among African communities. Her life story is presented as exceptional, emphasizing both her spiritual dedication and the moral example she set within the missionary enterprise.[109]

Although Mrs. Hinderer's long service and devotion are acknowledged, her identity is largely framed by her relationship to her husband and her role as a supportive missionary wife. The text foregrounds Mr. Hinderer's formal training, ordination, and institutional achievements, while Mrs. Hinderer's contributions are described in more personal and moral terms, emphasizing piety, endurance, and self-sacrifice rather than leadership or independent authority. Her entry into the mission field is portrayed as the fulfilment of a divine calling realized through marriage, reflecting prevailing Victorian gender norms that situated women's missionary participation within domestic and marital frameworks.

As an exemplary Christian woman, Sarah Bonetta Forbes (later known as Mrs. Davies) is the only African woman depicted in CMS publications, besides Hanna Afala. In 1880, the *Gleaner* published a commemorative article accompanied by her portrait, depicted in her youth and in "native dress." Her life story was presented in the context of renewed public discussion about the Kingdom of Dahomey and its ritual practices, particularly the "custom," or annual festival involving human sacrifice, known as the *Ek-que-noo-ah-toh-meh*.[110]

[109] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1889, 121.
[110] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1880, 134. Olatunji Ojo, "Slavery and Human Sacrifice in Yorubaland: Ondo, c. 1870–94," *Journal of African History*, no. 46 (2005), 397, 399. Elizabeth Isichei, "The quest for social reform in the context of traditional religion: a neglected theme of West African History," *African Affairs*, no. 77 (1978), 470. Robin Law, "Human sacrifice in pre-colonial West Africa," *African Affairs*, no. 84 (1985), 62, 78.



Illustration 5.31. "Sarah Bonetta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1880, 134.

Visually, the portrait emphasizes her "African dress" and her face marks, from the Egbado.[111] Her life is celebrated as a success of missionary intervention and imperial benevolence. Her contributions are expressed through her service to the Female Institution, her support for church fundraising, and her guidance of young women. These activities align with the gendered expectations placed upon missionary women, whose labour was typically domestic, educational, and pastoral rather than administrative or doctrinal.

At the same time, the narrative instrumentalizes her life to serve imperial and missionary agendas. Her survival from Dahomean sacrifice is used to contrast "barbarous" African customs with British moral authority, while her close association with Queen Victoria symbolically aligns African Christian womanhood with the British monarchy. This positioning transforms her personal history into a broader moral narrative about civilization, Christianity, and imperial guidance.[112]

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[111] As states by Henry Lovejoy, "Despite efforts to redefine her, traces of her past never fully disappeared. Her facial scarifications (*ilà*), once a marker of lineage and protection, could not be erased. While considered beautiful in Yorùbá culture, they were a source of discomfort in Victorian society." Henry B. Lovejoy, *Becoming Sarah Bonetta. A Yorùbá Woman in Queen Victoria's Court* (University of Toronto Press, Forthcoming), 78. Katrina Keefer, "Scarification and Identity in the Liberated Africans Department Register, 1814–1815," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 47, no. 3 (2013), 537–53. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. O. Johnson (Routledge & Sons, 1921; reprinted Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 105.

[112] Lovejoy, Becoming Sarah Bonetta, 17.

The report emphasizes her personal virtues, kindness, devotion, and spiritual resilience, especially during her final illness and death in 1880. Her faith, charitable work, and influence within the Christian community are highlighted as exemplary. Her close association with Queen Victoria further elevated her status as a symbol of African Christian womanhood within imperial discourse. Finally, Mrs. Davies's influence among African women is explicitly acknowledged. Her role as a mentor and advisor to young women suggests that African Christian women were not merely passive recipients of missionary influence, but also active agents in shaping local religious communities. However, their authority remained socially circumscribed within acceptable gender norms.

Sarah Forbes Bonetta and Hannah Afala (the mother of Bishop Samuel Crowther) are the only two African women whose names and portraits are explicitly recorded and repeatedly recognized in CMS publications. Both women appear more than once in the newspapers, marking them as exceptional figures within the missionary visual and textual archive. In Sarah's case, her portrait (mentioned before) and her Christian marriage (next image) were published in connection with the celebrations surrounding Queen Victoria's Jubilee.



Illustration 5.32. "Marriage of Sarah Forbes Bonetta, 1862," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1887, 71.

The image shows Sarah Forbes Bonetta's marriage in 1862,[113] accompanied by her life story. Sarah, an African protégée of Queen Victoria, was rescued from Dahomey as a child. In 1850, Captain Forbes of H.M.S. Bonetta was sent by the British Government to negotiate with King Gezo of Dahomey to help suppress the slave trade. Two years earlier, King Gezo's forces had destroyed a Yoruba town, capturing around 20,000 people. Among these was a nine-year-old girl whose parents had been killed, and she was destined for ritual sacrifice. The king gave this girl to Commander Forbes, who then brought her to England as a gift for the Queen.[114]

By royal command, the child was baptized and given the name Sarah Forbes Bonetta, then sent to Sierra Leone, where she received education at a C.M.S. school. She later studied in Brighton and eventually married an African merchant, Mr. James Davies.[115] The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Henry Venn, then Honorary Secretary of the C.M.S., along with the Bishop of Sierra Leone and other clergy. This publication stresses that Queen Victoria kindly agreed to sponsor Sarah's first child, named Victoria, and sent a silver cup as a christening gift.[116]

3.3 Women's Gatherings: Religion and Dance

In the next group of images, women are depicted primarily in the context of collective religious practices, ritual performances, and communal gatherings. Unlike earlier visual material, in which women appear mainly as domestic workers, traders, or mothers, these engravings foreground women's participation in indigenous spiritual life, ritual movement, and public ceremonies.

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[113] Anthony Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies: African Merchants in Lagos, 1851–1931* (Princeton University Press, 2024), 142–146.
[114] Biobaku, *Egba and their Neighbours.*
[115] Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies,* 135–161.
[116] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1887, 71.

Afresi and the Persecution of Christian Women in Ibadan

The *Gleaner* of 1860 features an engraving depicting the persecution of a Christian convert in Ibadan, an episode identified in the Church Missionary Society (CMS) sources as the "Persecution of Afresi." Although the image is the same in both publications, the accompanying text emphasizes different aspects. The engraving depicts a scene from the 1855 persecutions, showing a Yoruba father threatening to kill his daughter for refusing to worship traditional idols after her conversion to Christianity. Surrounding figures observe the confrontation, while ritual objects appear in the corner, and a woman with a child stands on the opposite side, reinforcing the domestic and communal dimensions of the conflict.[117]



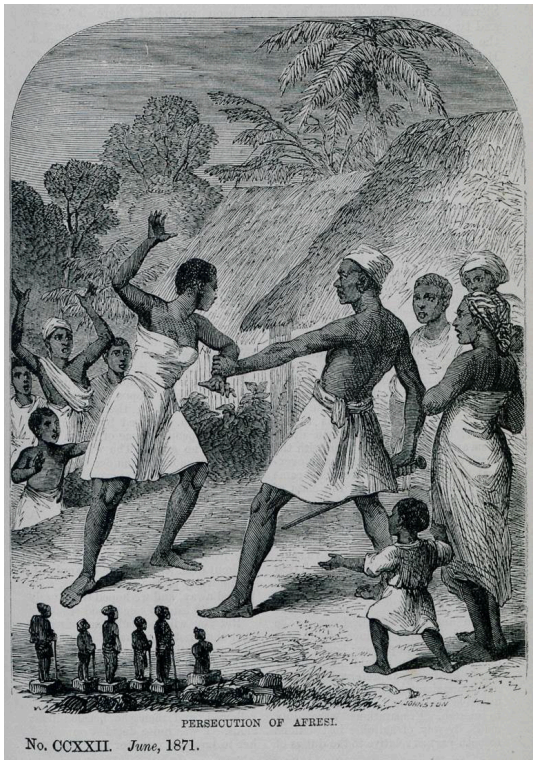

Illustration 5.33. "Persecution of a Christian daughter at Ibadan," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1860, 25; **5.34.** "Persecution of Afresi," *Church Missionary Paper*, No. CCXXII. June 1871, cover.

[117] Benjamina Efua Dadzie, "Collecting Abeokuta: Tracing the Provenance of Egba Material Culture from the Church Missionary Society Yoruba Mission," *Material Religion* 21, no.3 (2025): 268–89.

The *Gleaner* issue of 1860 published extracts from the journal of Rev. David Hinderer, documenting numerous cases of young women being flogged, dragged, chained, expelled from their homes during storms, or transferred to hostile relatives because of their Christian faith. One entry, dated November 4, recounts, "One of the persecuted girls is held in the stocks till Sunday is over. Another, about eighteen years old, is nearly killed by her father. Our people feed her and tend her in the night. Two of the persecuted have made their way to Abbeokuta and are safely hid there. The escape of one of them is nothing short of a miracle."[118]

These accounts underscore the gendered nature of persecution: young women, often daughters of priests or prospective brides, became especially vulnerable to familial and communal violence when they rejected traditional religious practices. Afresi appears in the *Church Missionary Papers* as part of a broader discussion of religious persecution in the Yoruba region, particularly in Ibadan. Whereas the *Gleaner* tends to present brief, episodic references, the *Missionary Papers* offer a more contextualized account of Afresi's situation and the wider resistance to Christianity.[119]

Afresi was born into a powerful Popo family in Badagry, deeply committed to fetish worship.[120] Through her husband, she converted to Christianity, a decision that provoked violent opposition from her relatives, particularly her brother, who persecuted her and subjected her to physical abuse. Following her brother's death, Afresi openly resumed Christian worship and made a public commitment to baptism. After her husband was baptized on 27 June, the couple formalized their marriage, though they continued to face hostility from the wider community.

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[118] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1860, 25–27.
[119] *Church Missionary Papers*, no. CCXXII, June 1871, 1–4.
[120] Regarding the Popo, Gollmer wrote, "The idolatry of the Popos is of the most debasing character: they have Ifa and Shango and the other deities of the Yorubas, but have added others to them; their national deity is a black, venomous snake, to whom they pay great respect, and they avowedly worship the evil spirit himself. Human sacrifices are not unfrequent, and the bones scattered round the fetish-houses tell of many such deeds of darkness." Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa*, 19.

In October, Afresi fell seriously ill. She refused to seek traditional remedies or to engage in what missionaries called “superstitious” practices, instead reaffirming her Christian faith. She died shortly thereafter, having maintained unwavering religious conviction to the end. In missionary memory, Afresi was commemorated as a symbol of perseverance and spiritual steadfastness in the face of persecution. Persecution was primarily directed at young female converts who refused to participate in traditional rituals, especially idol worship. These women were subjected to severe punishments, including flogging, restraint, deprivation of food, expulsion during storms, and threats of forced relocation to hostile relatives or reintegration into traditional religious life. In several instances, women managed to escape to Abeokuta, where Christian communities offered protection.

Afresi is portrayed as part of this persecuted group, exemplifying the heightened vulnerability of female converts whose religious choices challenged both spiritual authority and patriarchal control within Yoruba society. Missionary writers emphasized their physical suffering and endurance, framing these experiences as evidence of steadfast Christian faith and moral fortitude.

The texts further suggest that persecution intensified after warriors returned from conflict, emboldened by wealth and status. Traditional priests and idol worshippers, alarmed by the growing number of Christian converts, reportedly encouraged intimidation and violence. Women who supported or visited persecuted converts were punished, indicating that female religious solidarity was perceived as a threat to established social and religious structures. Within missionary discourse, Afresi and other persecuted women were portrayed as martyrs for the Christian cause. Their suffering was used to highlight the alleged cruelty of “heathen” practices

and to demonstrate the transformative power of Christianity, thereby justifying continued missionary intervention and appealing for support from British audiences.

Social Gatherings in Ijebu and Ofin

The *Gleaner* (1856) describes the Ijebu region as a large and fertile province of the Yoruba kingdom, situated northeast of Lagos, to which missionaries had recently gained access. The landscape is portrayed in highly romanticized terms, characterized by shaded forest lanes, towering palms and cotton trees, cultivated fields, and gently undulating wooded hills. Ijebu towns are presented as orderly and well-constructed, surrounded by defensive walls and fortified gateways; features that, according to the missionaries, reflected the region's persistent insecurity. Nonetheless, the introduction of Christianity is framed as a civilizing force that would eventually bring peace to the area.[121]



Illustration 5.35. "Ijebu sports, dancing on stilts," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1856, 61.

[121] T. O. Ogunkoya, "The Early History of Ijebu," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1, no. 1 (1956): 48–58.

The engraving accompanying the text, showing children dancing on stilts, illustrates what the missionaries described as common moonlight recreations enjoyed after the day's labour. Such scenes are used to emphasize both the communal nature of Ijebu society and the perceived simplicity of local leisure practices. The inhabitants are depicted as cheerful, industrious, and sociable, particularly when not disrupted by slave-trading wars.

In Dr. Irving's account of his welcome at Iperu and Ofin, he describes how crowds of men, women, and children greeted the missionaries with enthusiasm. Women are portrayed as part of the larger social community, engaging in communal activities and market trade, but their role is less emphasized than that of men in the official missionary narrative. However, when the missionaries approached Ofin, they were warned that "Oro was out," indicating women were forbidden from entering the town during ritual restrictions. Dr. Irving observed that women were absent from the streets during these periods, noting that male authority was visibly reinforced by excluding women from public spaces.[122]

Bonny: Destruction of Juju Worship and Women's Presence

The next engraving, from the *Gleaner*, depicts the destruction of the gods at Bonny, near the Niger Delta, and illustrates a moment of religious transformation framed by missionary discourse. In the foreground, men and children are actively dismantling the traditional religious symbols associated with the Juju house, while a woman, carrying a jar and accompanied by her children, passes through the scene. Although she is not the central focus of the image, her presence contributes to the composition of the landscape and reinforces the recurring visual

[122] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1856, 63. McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change*, 66, 205–208. Peel, "The Three Circles of Yoruba Religion," in: *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa-Religion. Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (University of California Press, 2016), 217.

association between women, domestic labour, and caregiving roles. Her partially naked body is also a topic of concern for the missionaries.



Illustration 5.36. "Destruction of the Gods at Bonny," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, July 1867, 73.

The accompanying text, drawn from a letter by Bishop Crowther, describes the Juju house in Bonny as a site of long-standing superstition and violence. According to the account, the structure was decorated with human skulls believed to belong to sacrificial victims, and additional bones were displayed outside the building. By the mid-1860s, however, the Juju house had fallen into disrepair, which missionaries interpreted as a sign of the decline of indigenous religious authority.[123]

Crowther's narrative further highlights the continued presence of sacred animals, particularly *guanas*, which were revered as divine creatures. These reptiles roamed freely through the town, often damaging property and livestock. Despite their sacred status, some

[123] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 73–74.

residents began to challenge their protected status, reflecting shifting attitudes toward traditional religious practices.[124]

The text also reveals missionary efforts to regulate women's behaviour, particularly regarding clothing and bodily modesty. When local girls came to the mission well to fetch water, many were described as partially unclothed. Since, "The water girls were instructed to direct their way to the Mission premises for a supply out of our well for their use. The girls poured suddenly upon us in great numbers, with their pitchers on their shoulders many of them in a state of nudity. Here was an opportunity for me [says Crowther] to correct the evil of such habits, which I could not do in the town."[125]

This situation was addressed, and missionaries imposed new rules requiring proper dress before entering mission premises, framing these changes as moral reforms. "Now I have made it a strong rule that no one should be allowed to enter the Mission premises to draw water unless clothed: they have cloths at home to use, but the habit of going without from childhood has made them careless and indifferent."[126] The narrative attributes the eventual dismantling of the Juju system to political change, particularly the influence of King Pepple's exile and the subsequent actions of his successor, George. The destruction of the sacred reptiles and the Juju house is presented as evidence of Christianity's gradual triumph over what missionaries described as "fetishism."[127]

As in the previous image, the next image, "Juju house of skulls at Bonny," depicts a woman passing by the Juju house while carrying goods on her head and accompanied by her

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[124] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 74–75.
[125] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 75.
[126] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 75.
[127] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 76. Misty L. Bastian, "Young Converts: Christian Missions, Gender and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria 1880-1929," *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2000): 145–58.

children. She does not occupy the central position in the composition; rather, women continue to function as complementary figures within the broader landscape. Their presence contributes to the visual context without becoming the primary focus of the scene.

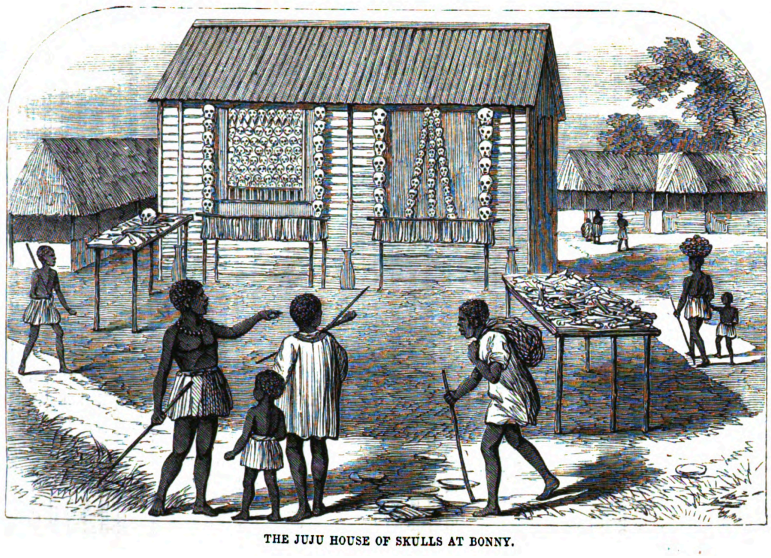

Illustration 5.37. "The Juju House of Skulls at Bonny," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 85.

It is unlikely that the repeated inclusion of women in scenes depicting both the Juju house and the destruction of traditional gods is coincidental. In both instances, women appear alongside moments of religious transformation and confrontation, suggesting their symbolic role as witnesses to these processes of spiritual change and cultural disruption. The article from the *Gleaner* then frames African religious practices through a strongly judgmental missionary lens, characterizing them as forms of "fetishism and demonolatry." Fetishes, also referred to as greegrees or jujus, are described as charms or amulets worn on the body or placed in specific locations to ward off evil or secure desired outcomes.[128]

[128] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1867, 87. According to McIntosh, "The magical charms and medicines (commonly known as "juju") produced by spiritually powerful people were held to have real power, and it was believed that witches (ordinarily women) could harm or kill others. Although Christians were taught to abstain from juju practices and witchcraft, most Yoruba continued to accept that forces that could not been seen, especially evil ones, operated in the world." McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change*, 40.

In general, the women in these scenes are positioned at the periphery, while men enact religious destruction or reconstruction, reinforcing their limited visibility in public religious and political transformations. Yet their repeated presence suggests that women remained integral to everyday life and communal continuity, even as missionary narratives sought to foreground male agency during moments of spiritual change.

Consulting Ifa: Women and Indigenous Ritual Knowledge

The engraving titled "Consulting Ifa" depicts three Yoruba women seated together while engaging in a ritual consultation with Ifa, a central divinatory and religious system in Yoruba society. The women are shown in domestic attire, wearing wrappers, beads, earrings, necklaces and head coverings, with one displaying facial scarification. They are gathered around ritual objects, including a wooden cup used to contain Ifa-related materials. Ifa, an oracle composed of palm-nuts, stones, and kola-nut fragments, guided decisions in all aspects of life, including domestic, social, political, and commercial.



Illustration 5.38. "Consulting Ifa," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 70; 1889, 119, *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 14.

The image of women consulting Ifa highlights women's participation in Yoruba spiritual practices. It was published twice in the *Gleaner*, then in the *Pictorial Album* and in Gollmer's publication.[129] Their posture and interaction suggest an act of spiritual inquiry rather than casual conversation or mere passive observation of religious life.

The accompanying text explains that Ifa worship was deeply embedded in daily Yoruba life. Decisions related to business, domestic matters, social relations, and political affairs were often made only after consulting Ifa. Nothing of importance, whether undertaken by kings, chiefs, free people, or enslaved individuals, was done without divinatory guidance.

The priest of Ifa, known as a Babalawo, held significant authority. He was believed to have access to hidden knowledge and to future events, serving as an intermediary between the spiritual and human worlds. The term *Babalawo* is interpreted as "looking father," referring to someone who can see both visible and invisible realities. The text emphasizes that Ifa worship shaped political and social decisions, including warfare, migration, and town planning. Chiefs frequently relied on Babalawo guidance before taking major actions, demonstrating the institutional power of religious specialists.[130]

From a missionary perspective, the practice is described as a form of fetishism, and the article contrasts it with Christianity, which is presented as offering "light," moral reform, and spiritual freedom. Together, the image and text portray Yoruba religion as pervasive and authoritative, while reinforcing the missionary narrative that Christian conversion was necessary to replace traditional beliefs.

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[129] Charles A. Gollmer, *His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 39.
[130] McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change* (Indiana University Press, 2009), 40. J. D.Y. Peel, Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba (Indiana University Press, 2000).

Processions to Draw Water for the Gods

The next illustration depicts a scene frequently observed in Abeokuta: a procession of women and girls travelling to a well or stream to collect water for one of their gods. These processions typically involved large groups of women and girls, dressed in their finest garments and adorned with ornaments associated with the specific deity they served. As they walked, they sang praises to their god in loud, rhythmic tones, often accompanied by drummers. As described in the publication next to the image, the procession was usually followed by a crowd of onlookers, turning the act into a public religious performance.[131]

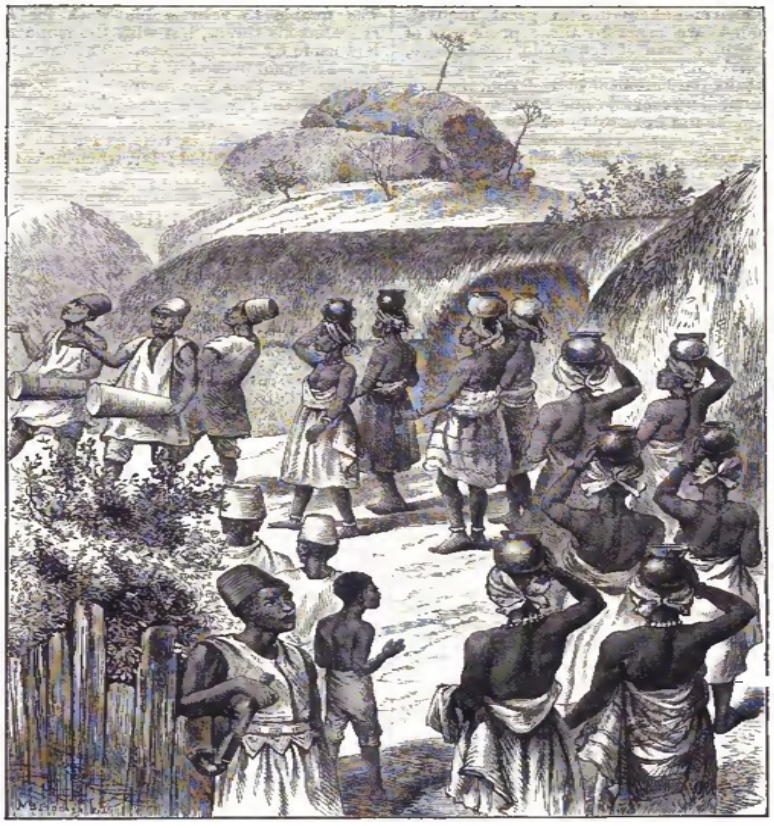

Illustration 5.39. "Procession to Draw Water for the Gods," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1881, 127; *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 19.

[131] Peel, "The Three Circles of Yoruba Religion," 217.

Such processions frequently passed near mission churches and disrupted Christian services with their noise. These scenes emphasize women's collective visibility in religious ritual. Unlike earlier images in which women appear only marginally or in domestic contexts, here they occupy public space as ritual actors, participating in organized, symbolic movement and vocal performance.

At the same time, the *Gleaner* frames these gatherings as disruptive to Christian worship. Because church services were held with open doors and shutters due to the climate, the noise from the processions frequently drowned out the voices of preachers and readers. The article thus contrasts Christian order with what it portrays as the disorderly and intrusive nature of traditional religious expressions, reinforcing missionary critiques of local spiritual practices.

Across these images, women are consistently portrayed as key participants in religious and communal life, yet their roles are shaped by gendered expectations. In Christian contexts, women appear as persecuted converts, often punished by male relatives for rejecting traditional worship. In indigenous religious scenes, women are visible as ritual performers, oracle consultants, and procession participants, highlighting their central role in spiritual practice.

At the same time, women are often portrayed as secondary figures in missionary narratives, present yet unnamed, peripheral to male authority, and framed by caregiving or domestic roles. Their bodies and movements are regulated by both traditional and Christian moral systems. Together, these representations reveal that women's religious lives were deeply embedded in Yoruba society, even as missionary discourse sought to redefine and control their spiritual and social roles.

4. Women as the Labour Force and Mothers

In the following images, women are represented within their daily routines and as essential contributors to family and community labour. Four main visual representations are examined: "Natives of Abeokuta," "Yoruba woman dyeing cloth," "Negresses of Abeokuta with indigo," and "A Street Breakfast in Abeokuta." These images predominantly portray adult women, with only one instance including the children, a boy and a young girl assisting in cloth dyeing. Unlike earlier images, in which women often appeared in the background or were associated with children, here they occupy the central visual space and serve as the primary subjects of the engravings.[132]

Women as the Labour Force

Women of Abeokuta

The engraving titled "Natives of Abeokuta" was published multiple times in the *Gleaner,*[133] the *Pictorial Album*, and *Missionary Papers* (1864). While not all versions included a detailed description, the image was generally accompanied by texts discussing Abeokuta and its inhabitants. In 1889, it was part of a compilation of images (collage); the image was described as "a group in every way typical of Natives in Yoruba towns."[134]

[132] Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta*. Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland." Marshall, "Women, Trade and the Yoruba Family." McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change*.
[133] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1850, 1878, 1889.
[134] *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1889, 119.

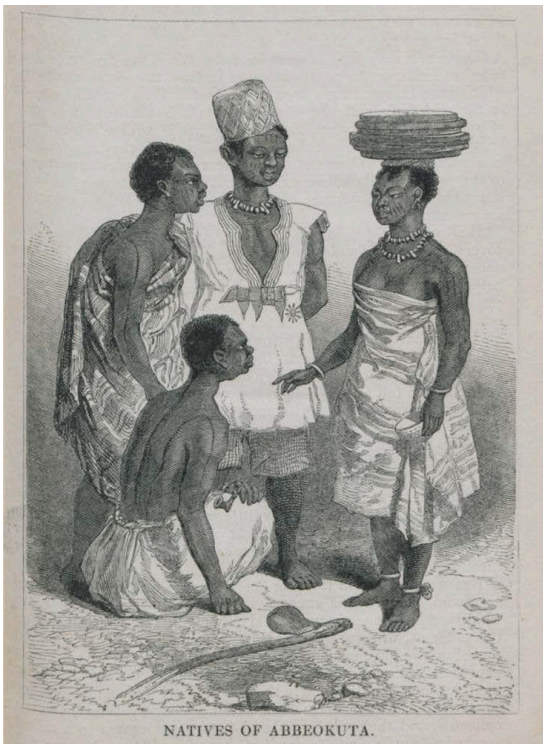

Illustration 5.40. "Natives of Abbeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, April 1850, Frontispiece; 1878, 59. *Pictorial Album*, 14. *Missionary Papers*, 1864, 1.

According to the *Pictorial Album*, Africans were portrayed as having a "proverbial weakness for palavering," or gossiping, which was framed as an impediment to productive labour.[135] The 1864 *Missionary Papers* further contextualized the image by highlighting changes in dress, noting a shift from indigenous clothing to European garments. The engraving described the scene as "a group of Abbeokuta people, and the different dresses worn by the men and women."[136] Rev. W. Moore reported that, during a two-hour journey from Oshielle to Abeokuta, he encountered 1,305 people, of whom only two wore entirely native cloth, 195 wore garments combining native and European materials, and 1,108 wore clothing made exclusively from

[135] *The Gleaner Pictorial Album*, 14.
[136] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1864, 1.

European cloth. The publication expressed the hope that the spread of European habits would be accompanied by "a corresponding progress in Christianity."[137]

The article also recalled that the previous Quarterly Paper on the Yoruba Mission, published at Christmas 1861, had described the mission's decline due to the then-ongoing devastating war and had appealed for prayers for the restoration of peace. In the present issue, the editors reiterated this request, noting that several recent events had renewed concern for what had once been a prosperous mission.[138]

The next image appeared in the Gleaner in 1851 and again in 1879. The engraving represents a common sight in the streets and marketplaces of Abeokuta: the sale of ekko, a hot gruel made from Indian cornmeal that constituted the regular Yoruba breakfast. This meal was typically prepared and sold by women, who ladled it from earthen pots with wooden spoons into small calabashes, while customers paid one or two cowries according to their means. The practice was comparable to the early-morning coffee stalls familiar in English urban life.[139]

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[137] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1864, 1. As Byfield states, Dress reflected these wider changes taking place during that period. For example, in Abeokuta and Lagos, towns with extensive Christian and educational histories, young people more frequently wore European attire during formal events like weddings and as part of their daily clothing. "European dress came to indicate one's wealth, achieved or anticipated social status, and modernity." Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta,* 67.
[138] *Church Missionary Papers*, 1864, 1.
[139] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1851, 188.

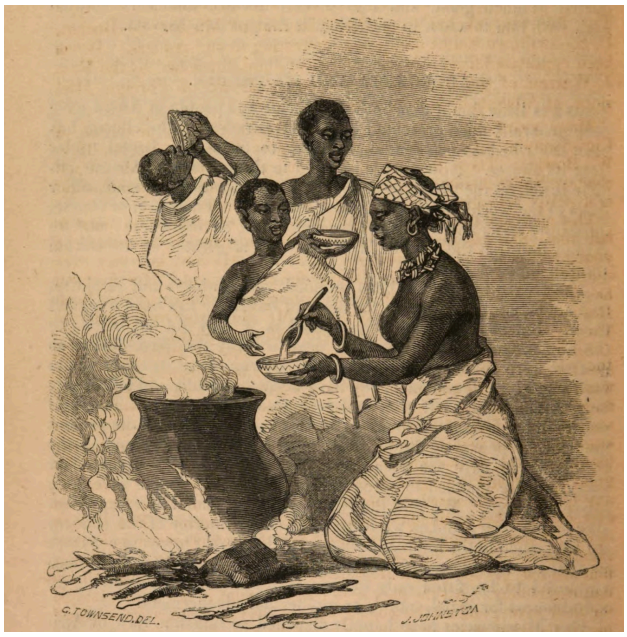

Illustration 5.41. "A Street Breakfast in Abeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* July 1851, 188; *The Church Missionary Gleaner,* 1879, 135.

The narrative also noted that yoruba domestic eating customs differed from those in Britain. Families did not generally eat together; husbands ate separately from their wives, often in the company of their male children, while mothers provided food for younger children and daughters. Prepared street food was therefore frequently consumed in place of home-cooked meals.[140]

The breakfast was usually taken around seven o'clock in the morning, not within the household but at street food stalls or in marketplaces, much like the hot coffee English workers bought on their way to work. When *ekko* was sold cold, it took on a congealed, blancmange-like appearance and was commonly eaten with *obbe*, or "palaver sauce," a mixture of fish, meat, or fowl with palm oil, pepper, and bitter herbs. This dish was especially popular, and because most people ate outdoors, the women who prepared and sold such food were often surrounded by customers at peak hours of the day. At the time, Abeokuta was estimated to have a population of

[140] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1851, 188.

about 100,000, of whom about 2,000 were African Christians associated with the Church Missionary Society's work.[141]

The following image depicts a Yoruba woman engaged in cloth dyeing. This image appeared in the *Gleaner* in both 1876 and 1889, indicating that the newspaper reproduced the same engraving on more than one occasion.

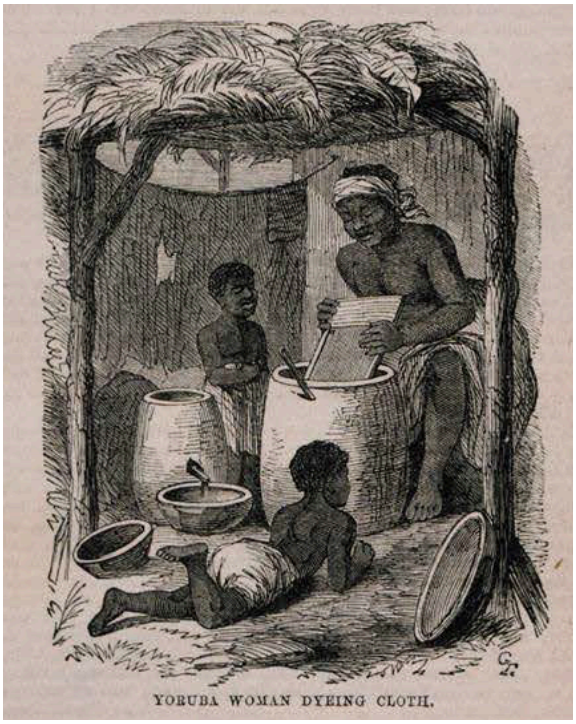

Illustration 5.42. "Yoruba woman dying cloth," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 35.

The engraving portrayed an African woman engaged in cloth dyeing, surrounded by dye-pots and wooden bowls. Her young daughter watched closely, suggesting the transmission of women's occupations across generations, while a boy rested nearby. The woman worked beneath a shelter made of palm leaves and wooden poles, with dyed cloths hanging beside her. This depiction foregrounded women's labour as both productive and instructional.[142]

[141] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1879, 135.
[142] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1876, 35. Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland," 48.

The production of *adire* became one of the most important sectors of the Yoruba textile industry during the nineteenth century. As Byfield notes, "adire was primarily a women's industry," placing women at the center of textile production and dyeing.[143] The industry expanded significantly from the mid-century onward, as innovations in dyeing techniques encouraged the creation of more varied cloth patterns and influenced women's fashion.[144] Despite the growing availability of imported textiles, locally produced cloth remained highly valued. Shields observes that "home-spun cloths and adire wrappers were more expensive and of a better quality than the imported variety,"[145] while McIntosh notes that Africans generally disliked the patterns and colours of British cotton textiles and regarded imported fabrics as inferior to locally made cloth; as late as 1890, approximately 95 percent of the cloth used in Yorubaland was still home-produced.[146] At the same time, women incorporated imported fabrics into existing Yoruba textile traditions, so that *adire* and indigo-dyed wrappers continued to express cultural continuity while adapting to changing fashions through imported cloth, tailored blouses, and resist-dyeing techniques.[147]

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[143] Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta*, 73.
[144] Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland," 138.
[145] Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland," 138.
[146] McIntosh*, Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change,* 143.
[147] Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta*, 73. Imported British textiles became increasingly visible in Yoruba markets during the late nineteenth century, yet locally produced cloth continued to command significant consumer preference. The governor of Lagos, Alfred Moloney, believed that African textile producers retained a competitive advantage, noting that imports did not follow a steady upward trajectory. The value of British cloth entering Lagos declined from £225,112 in 1884 to £138,183 in 1886 before recovering to £192,896 in 1888, while local economic and political conflicts further disrupted commercial exchange. At the same time, imported textiles came to be associated with olaju (enlightenment) and with participation in a broader notion of a 'civilized' world. However, rather than displacing local traditions, these fabrics were incorporated into Yoruba textile practices through cloths such as adire, which combined imported materials with indigenous aesthetic forms. The adire industry illustrated the multiple ways in which Abeokuta became integrated into the global economy, as its producers relied on imported cloth while its principal consumers were cash-crop producers. Equally significant, because adire was primarily a women's industry, it placed women at the center of these economic transformations and commercial networks rather than at their margins. Although imported Manchester prints and calico were cheaper, lighter, and more comfortable, they were generally considered inferior in quality and durability to locally woven Yoruba cloths. Contemporary observers noted that indigenous textiles lasted longer and were therefore more expensive, while imported fabrics often required re-dyeing because their colours faded quickly. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta*,171, 178–179, 181, 182.

The next image was published in the *Gleaner* in 1878. The engraving depicts two women carrying indigo on plates balanced on their heads. One of the women displays distinctive Egbado facial scarification, like in the portrait of Sarah Forbes Bonetta or the woman in the Consulting Ifa image.

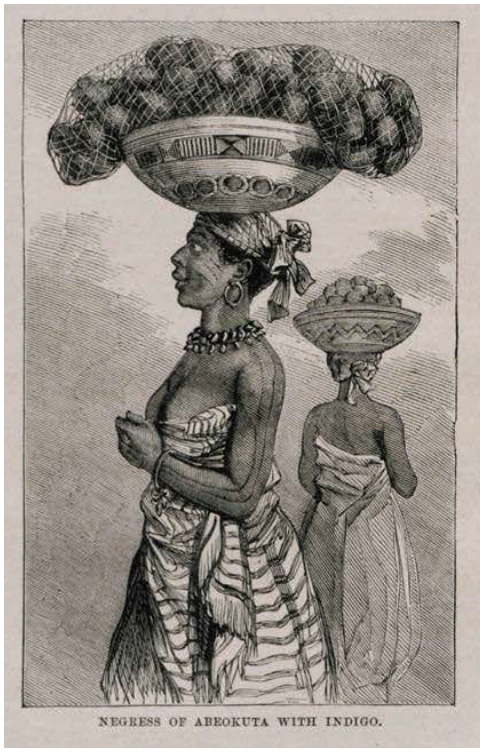

Illustration 5.43. "Negress of Abeokuta with Indigo," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1878, 71.

Their clothing is more elaborately rendered than in earlier images: their bodies are fully covered, and they wear earrings and necklaces, marking a visual contrast with previous representations of women. Although the accompanying newspaper article, written by Bishop Crowther in "His Life and Work in Abeokuta," focuses primarily on the broader history of Abeokuta, the image itself foregrounds women's labour in textile production and trade. In earlier depictions from the Niger Delta, women were shown working in ground-level dye pits. This engraving, therefore, complements the earlier representation of a woman dyeing cloth by

illustrating a different stage of the same economic activity, namely the transport and circulation of indigo within local markets.[148]

Across these images, women are consistently depicted as active participants in economic and domestic labour. Their roles as food vendors, cloth dyers, and carriers of goods underscore their central position in sustaining household and community life. At the same time, the association with children reinforces missionary ideals of Christian motherhood, emphasizing in this case women's responsibility for nurturing and moral instruction.

Notably, while women occupy the visual foreground in these engravings, they are rarely named or individualized. Their identities remain generalized, defined primarily by labour and maternal function rather than by personal history, specific region of habitation, or social authority. This contrasts with the detailed naming of male figures, including chiefs, missionaries, and converts, in earlier images from the CMS publications. Overall, these images represent women as essential workers and mothers, a theme the next images will expand on.

Women as mothers

In many of the earlier images, women were portrayed primarily in relation to their children, reinforcing the missionary ideal of the "good Christian woman" as a wife and mother. Female identity is often framed by marriage, caregiving, and domestic responsibility. The following four images, however, depart from these earlier representations. The first depicts a specific reunion between a mother and her son, now a grown man and missionary, Thomas King,

[148] According to Byfield, indigo and indigo-dyed cloth served multiple functions in Yoruba society and were deeply integrated into its secular, ritual, and aesthetic practices, appearing at various stages of the life cycle: preparing the way for marriage and conception, creating possibilities for success, curing the body, and heralding an individual's departure from this life. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers in Abeokuta,* 12. Burton likewise observed that Abeokuta not only produced enough indigo for local use but also generated a surplus for export. He reported that Abeokuta exported indigo balls weighing approximately one-quarter of a pound each, priced at 2½ strings of cowries, equivalent to approximately 2½ pence. Richard Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountains*, vol.1 & vol.2, (1863), 316.

who narrates the shared experience of enslavement that shaped their separation and eventual reunion. The second image is a portrait of Hannah Afala, the mother of Samuel Crowther. She is the only African adult woman represented in an individual portrait in the CMS visual corpus, marking her as a rare exception within the broader pattern of anonymous maternal representation.

The last two images portray women with their children: in one, a woman carries her baby on her back; in the other, a young boy stands beside his mother. These are the only representations in which women appear without personal identification, depicted solely through their maternal role rather than through individual biography or social context. The following four images offer a more nuanced perspective on motherhood by foregrounding maternal relationships shaped by slavery, separation, reunion, and cultural practice.

Thomas King's mother

The first image depicts the reunion between Thomas King, an African missionary who accompanied Henry Townsend on itinerant missions through Abeokuta, and his elderly mother. Their meeting took place in Lagos after years of forced separation caused by the transatlantic slave trade. The illustration shows the mother seated on the ground in visible emotional distress, surrounded by a crowd, while King stands nearby with Townsend. The scene visually emphasizes the mother's grief, endurance, and emotional response rather than her individual identity, which remains unnamed.



Illustration 5.44. "The meeting of Thomas King and his mother at Abbeokuta," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1850, 128.

King's own account describes the moment of recognition: "Among those who came to meet us in the way was my aged mother, but she was too old to recognize her son among the crowd. When I was pointed out to her, so much was she overcome by her feelings, that she sat down in great amazement, weeping, while all the bystanders were rejoicing with her, and blessing the people of England on my behalf."[149]

The narrative contrasts King's mother with Samuel Crowther's mother, who was initially described as a "dark heathen" but later converted to Christianity. By contrast, King's mother had already embraced the Gospel through her own experiences and thus understood her reunion within a Christian framework of gratitude and divine providence: "As she rejoiced amidst her tears, she knew where her gratitude should be directed; and, as she embraced her son, felt the

[149] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1850, 128.

more strongly the love of Him who gave His only-begotten Son for sinners of every nation under heaven."[150]

King's reflections further link personal reunion to broader missionary narratives of redemption, as discussed in chapter four. Formerly enslaved Egbas, he explains, returned from Sierra Leone not only materially improved but spiritually transformed, now capable of bringing Christianity back to their communities.[151]

Hannah Afala

Hannah Afala, the mother of Bishop Samuel Crowther, is the only African adult woman to appear in a formal portrait in CMS publications. Her life story and reunion with her son were documented in the *Gleaner*, the *Church Missionary Papers*, and the *Pictorial Album*.



Illustration 5.45. "Hannah Afala," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1884, 129; *Pictorial Album*, 25.

The portrait, published in the *Church Missionary Gleaner* in 1884, depicted Hannah Afala at approximately ninety-five or ninety-six years of age. She was seated in an ornate

[150] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1850, 129. Richard Anderson, *African Narratives of Slavery and Abolition: Testimonies from the 19th Century* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).
[151] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1850, 129. Shields, "Palm oil and Power: Women Yorubaland," 36–37.

wooden chair with a twisted, spiral-carved backrest and decorative finials, a chair that conveyed a degree of status and dignity rather than simple domesticity and that appeared in subsequent missionary portraits of African women, suggesting a degree of standardization in the visual conventions employed by CMS publications. She sat in a composed, upright posture, her hands resting gently in her lap, her expression calm and dignified. Her attire consisted of traditional Yoruba dress: a wrapped cloth garment covering her lower body and draped across one shoulder, leaving the other bare, with a small decorative embroidery visible on the upper portion of the garment. Her head was wrapped in a traditional cloth, tied neatly at the front. No shoes were visible. Her clothing reflected her lifelong refusal to adopt European customs, differing slightly from the dress worn by the woman in the following image, though both figures shared a similar seated posture and compositional framing. The overall composition emphasized her age, visible in the lines of her face and the thinness of her arms, while simultaneously projecting an air of quiet authority and self-possession that distinguished this portrait from more generic missionary representations of African women. As the *Gleaner* noted, 'she liked to sit on a little stall in the Lagos market like a true Yoruba woman,' a detail that the portrait appeared to echo in its emphasis on her traditional dress and composed demeanour.

According to missionary reports, Hannah Afala was captured in 1821 when her town of Osogun (Oshogun) was attacked by Muslim slave raiders. Her husband was killed, and she and her three children were taken captive. One of those children, Adjai, later became Samuel Crowther, the first African Anglican bishop. Twenty-four years later, Crowther returned to Abeokuta as a CMS missionary and was reunited with his mother, who had been redeemed by her daughters. She was placed under the instruction of Rev. Henry Townsend and baptized in 1848, receiving the name Hannah. She lived to nearly one hundred years of age and never

adopted European customs, not even in dress. At the time of her death in 1883, she was over one hundred years old.

This narrative presented Hannah Afala not only as a mother but also as a symbolic figure of Christian redemption, endurance, and maternal faith. Yet, like other women in CMS representations, her identity was largely defined by her relationship with a male missionary figure and by her role as his mother. The portrait emphasized this framing by showing her not as an active participant in mission life, such as a convert, community member, or agent of religious change, but mainly as a symbol of Christianity's civilizing and redemptive power. Despite her conversion to Christianity, her continued use of traditional dress served as visual proof of resistance to missionary efforts that were not fully effective with her. In this sense, the image operated within the same representational conventions that shaped CMS textual accounts of African women more broadly, foregrounding the missionary narrative at the expense of the individual woman's own story.

Yoruba Motherhood and its clothing

The last two additional images from the *Gleaner* (1874) depict unnamed African women in maternal roles: one shows a Yoruba mother carrying her child on her back, and the other portrays a Native woman in Lagos with her daughter. Both images emphasize clothing, posture, and bodily presentation more than personal identity.





Illustration 5.46. "Mother and Daughter at Lagos," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1874, 115.
Illustration 5.47. "Yoruba mother and child," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1874, 139.

The American missionary Bowen described the women's dress as "A woman's dress consists of three wrappers, two round the waist and one over the shoulders, but the last is often laid aside. Women do not shave their heads, except as a mark of mourning. Their usual head-dress is a fillet of cloth; most of the people of both sexes generally go barefoot. Boys are usually provided with breeches, or, at least, an apron, at the age of five or six; but girls of ten or twelve years often appear in the streets, from choice, wearing nothing but their beads and bracelets."[152] Samuel Johnson stated that Yoruba clothing prior to the nineteenth century was quite simple and exclusively of "native manufacture." The kings and chiefs were the only individuals who wore gowns, whereas less wealthy men typically wore a cloth 'sheet' (measuring three yards by two) wrapped around their bodies, passing under the right armpit and overlapping over the left

[152] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1874, 116.

shoulder.[153] Byfield also argues that the Yoruba dress was not static, noting that it had reflected changing historical and economic circumstances.[154]

The image of the Yoruba mother carrying her child illustrates a widely recognized maternal practice. The *Gleaner* noted that Mrs. Anna Hinderer, who served for many years in Ibadan, adopted this method while caring for a rescued orphan: "She carried [the baby] about on her back in the native fashion; and when in England, she would sometimes take a sofa-cushion and cleverly tie it behind her in the folds of a shawl to show exactly how the African children are carried."[155] This anecdote was presented as an example of missionary fascination with African maternal customs, while simultaneously framing them through European observation and imitation.

By the end of the nineteenth century, dress in Yorubaland had become a significant site through which broader debates about identity, modernity, gender, and colonial influence were expressed. Although some Christian elites adopted European clothing, this process did not result in the abandonment of Yoruba dress traditions. Rather, clothing practices evolved through the selective incorporation of imported materials and styles. European dress was increasingly criticized as unsuitable for the African climate and as a symbol of mental bondage, while indigenous textiles retained considerable cultural prestige. Consumers continued to value Yoruba cloth and incorporated British fabrics into existing textile traditions rather than replacing them. Untailored wrappers and indigo-dyed cloths-maintained continuity with mid-nineteenth-century forms of dress, while imported cloth, tailored blouses (*buba*), shoes, and resist-dyeing techniques contributed to the emergence of new expressions of "traditional" attire.[156]

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[153] Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas,* 110.
[154] Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers*.
[155] *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1874, 139.
[156] Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers,* 70, 73.

Women occupied a particularly important place in this process. As producers and consumers in the *adire* industry, they stood at the intersection of local traditions and global markets. The industry reflected Abeokuta's integration into the world economy through the use of imported cloth and the purchasing power of cash-crop producers, yet it remained primarily a women's industry. At the same time, some women challenged both Victorian ideals and missionary expectations. Abigail Macaulay, Crowther's daughter, continued trading despite CMS pressure to abandon economic activity, while the daughters of Richard Blaize deliberately wore combinations of *adire*, handwoven cloth, and European prints in public. Their choices demonstrated that women were not passive recipients of cultural change but active participants in shaping new forms of identity, using dress to negotiate continuity, modernity, and resistance in a rapidly changing colonial world.[157]

Taken together, these two images of unnamed Yoruba women, alongside the portrait of Hannah Afala examined earlier, reveal the broader representational conventions through which the CMS constructed visual narratives of African womanhood. These images consistently frame women primarily in terms of their maternal roles. Whether depicted as grieving mothers, elderly survivors of slavery, or caregivers with infants, women are shown more as relational figures connected to sons, husbands, or children rather than as individuals. With the exception of Hannah Afala, Sarah Bonetta, and Afresi, most women remain unnamed, and even Afala's story centres on her role as Bishop Crowther's mother rather than on her own experiences and commitments.

[157] The dress could also symbolize resistance to British imperialism by contrasting European and Yoruba attire, thereby underscoring gender and generational tensions, particularly among educated young women. European names and clothing signified complex cultural roles, as noted: "every African bearing a foreign name is like a ship sailing under false colours, and every African wearing a foreign dress in his country is like the jackdaw in peacock's feathers." Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: Women Dyers,* 69, 70, 73.

The emotional weight of motherhood is conveyed visually: women are often depicted seated, kneeling, or at the margins of crowds, reinforcing ideas of vulnerability, endurance, and domestic attachment. Their bodies carry both literal and symbolic burdens, including children, grief, memory, and faith. In contrast, men appear as missionaries, leaders, soldiers, and agents of movement and transformation.

These portrayals reflect the CMS's broader gender ideology, in which women's spiritual and social value was closely tied to motherhood, domestic virtue, and emotional resilience. Although women were essential to missionary life, as shown in Chapter Four, particularly in education, caregiving, and community formation, the visual and textual record largely confines them to maternal roles, offering limited recognition of them as independent historical actors. The gap between women's actual contributions to mission life and their representation in CMS publications thus constitutes not merely an oversight but a deliberate narrative choice, one that reinforces prevailing gender hierarchies while obscuring the complexity and agency of the women whose lives these images purported to document.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) archives are essential for understanding the interactions between London and mission areas within the British Empire. These documents allow us to reconstruct institutional strategies and see how missionary work transformed daily life by reinterpreting Christian ideas. In this process, local communities were not just passive recipients but active participants who adapted missionary teachings to create new identities, forms of authority, and social influence within the imperial context.

The CMS had a profound influence on African, Caribbean, and Asian societies by establishing educational, medical, and religious institutions that expanded access to Western literacy, technical skills, and social mobility. Schools like Fourah Bay College in Freetown and the Grammar School in Lagos became central in shaping a Christian-educated African elite, who would later be influential in the political and nationalist movements of the twentieth century.

Simultaneously, missionary expansion was deeply linked to the British imperial agenda. Missions served not only to spread evangelism but also as channels for disseminating British cultural standards, moral principles, and administrative techniques, helping to establish new colonial hierarchies. However, local interactions with these processes varied and were often active rather than passive. Converts, educators, and community leaders engaged with Christianity and missionary education by integrating them into their own cultural contexts, using imperial tools to forge new religious and political identities.

The expansion of Anglican missions in West Africa coincided with major social changes following the process of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. In this period, Christianity became a key force of cultural transformation, altering social hierarchies and fostering new

community structures. While missionary activities often aligned with imperial goals, they also helped form local elites who later took part in reform and emancipation movements. Despite facing instability, missionary efforts led to a significant rise in Christian conversions from 1840 to 1890, driven by the expansion of schools and the training of African missionaries across West African mission sites.

A key methodological insight from this study is that archives are inherently fragmented, gendered, and shaped by power dynamics. Since most sources were created by male missionaries, traders, and colonial officials, women are recorded selectively, often only during crises or suspected transgressions. As a result, women appear as partial, mediated, and morally judged figures rather than fully documented historical actors. This situation constitutes a form of archival violence, as discussed by Jessica Marie Johnson, in which women's lives are fragmented and distorted across institutional records.

In response, this study employs a microhistorical approach to reconstruct women's histories using fragmented and indirect evidence. Incomplete life accounts are methodologically valuable because they expose survival strategies, negotiations, mobility, and resistance. Therefore, fragmentation is not just a limitation of the archive but a significant historical condition that reflects the lived experiences of slavery, displacement, and documentation systems.

While CMS archives are ideologically organized around discipline, conversion, and social norms, highlighting women mainly during conflicts or interventions, they still offer vital insights into women's lived experiences when interpreted carefully. These sources show women as key figures in African and Atlantic histories, engaged in economic activities, mediating

kinship ties, influencing religious practices, and navigating systems of slavery and dependency. Although their agency was limited, it was essential to broader historical changes.

This thesis has argued that the spread of Christianity in West Africa created conditions allowing women to access new opportunities and actively shape spaces of autonomy. Despite male-dominated missionary stories, African women played key roles across mission networks in Freetown, the Bight of Benin, and along the Niger River. Although CMS records are incomplete and influenced by ideology, they offer rare insights into women's lives and highlight their crucial involvement in the social, religious, and political changes of the nineteenth century, including the development of Yoruba as a broader, redefined identity category.

Conversion strategies differed greatly depending on the mission context, influenced by political instability, conflict, and the shift from illegal to "legitimate" trade. Missionaries frequently had to adjust their approaches to suit local circumstances; for instance, even when slaveholders denied manumission, enslaved people were still integrated into Christian communities. This flexibility highlights the intricate nature of missionary involvement and the negotiated process of conversion.

This study addresses ongoing debates about the marginalization of women in African history. As discussed in Chapter Two, this marginalization results not from women's absence but from the analytical frameworks used to interpret historical processes. Scholars like Judith Byfield, Edna Bay, Kristin Mann, Pernille Ipsen, Mariana Candido, Vanessa Oliveira, and Misty Bastian highlight the importance of scrutinizing both sources and conceptual categories, especially rigid gender binaries and the focus on institutional narratives. Simultaneously, foundational works by Ajayi and Ayandele are crucial for reconstructing missionary history, though they largely omit women's experiences. This thesis extends these approaches by

emphasizing women's experiences and viewing the archive as a space of mediation, silence, and power.

The implications of this approach extend beyond the recovery of individual lives. Women's appearance in missionary sources, typically at moments of capture, illness, conversion, or conflict, reveals the structural conditions that governed their visibility. These moments illuminate broader systems of slavery, kinship, and missionary intervention, allowing for the reconstruction of life trajectories characterized not only by suffering and constraint but also by adaptation, negotiation, and participation.

Chapter Three's regional context offers the foundational framework for these trajectories. Nineteenth-century Yorubaland experienced political division, militarization, and increased mobility following the fall of the Oyo Empire and Ilorin's expansion under the Sokoto Caliphate. Warfare played a key role in social change, causing displacement, forced migration, and the spread of slavery and dependency networks. The destruction of towns like Owu, the emergence of Ibadan, and Abeokuta's consolidation as a refuge city demonstrate how conflicts altered demographic and spatial patterns, resulting in a highly mobile population where women and children faced particular risks of capture and integration.

These dynamics were part of larger global shifts, including the reorganization of slavery known as the "Second Slavery," which intensified internal systems of enslavement focused on agriculture and political economies. Simultaneously, identity formation experienced substantial reconfiguration. The rise of Yoruba as a broad identity was a nineteenth-century development influenced by displacement, missionary classification, and diasporic interactions. Terms like Aku, Nago, Lucumí, and Terranova further highlight the relational and constructed aspects of identity within Atlantic and regional contexts.

During this period, religious transformation was marked by diversity and rivalry rather than straightforward replacement. Indigenous Orișa practices, Islam, and Christianity coexisted within overlapping domains, creating a vibrant setting where beliefs were constantly negotiated. Recognizing this religious turbulence is crucial for understanding the patterns of conversion, resistance, and adaptation.

The dissertation shows that women's experiences are complex and cannot be simplified into straightforward stories of "enslavement to freedom" or "heathenism to conversion." Instead, their lives were influenced by multiple, interconnected systems of warfare, slavery, disrupted kinship ties, religious transformations, and institutional interventions throughout West Africa and the Atlantic world.

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, slavery was a multi-stage process that crossed a person's life. Women's experiences went beyond their initial capture to include several phases such as displacement, sale, domestic integration, and, in some instances, redemption. Building on the research of Paul E. Lovejoy and David Northrup, this analysis underscores the gender-specific aspects of these experiences, especially the importance of kinship disruption. The frequent separation of mothers and children underscores how slavery involved both labor exploitation and the fragmentation of social relations.

Missionary environments brought about new structures of organization and a sense of belonging. Mission stations across Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, and along the Niger acted as spaces of both disruption and rebuilding. Women entered these settings through various routes, as "Liberated Africans," escapees seeking safety, or those aiming for education and conversion, and helped develop new social networks that redefined, rather than completely eliminated, existing divisions.

Within these frameworks, women assumed various active roles. As wives, mothers, schoolteachers, catechists, and communicants, they contributed significantly to the daily functions and development of missionary initiatives. These roles were integral, not just auxiliary to the core of mission life.

Education played a central yet contradictory role, simultaneously fostering disciplinary ideals aligned with missionary values while equipping women with skills for social and economic involvement. Literacy, religious teachings, and technical training opened pathways to teaching, commerce, and various activities, demonstrating how missionary efforts could be both restrictive and empowering.

Conversion must therefore be understood as a relational and negotiated process within kinship networks. Women often served as mediators of religious change, affecting family members and maintaining Christian practices at home. Intergenerational interactions, such as children encouraging their mothers to convert, highlight how religious ideas circulated within family units.

The analysis in the last chapter reveals that women's visibility in CMS texts and images is structured by gender-based hierarchies. Frequently shown as mothers, traders, or workers in the background, women remain on the margins of visual scenes that favour male figures and institutions. However, a critical examination of these representations reveals their active involvement in economic and social activities, highlighting the contrast between their marginal status and their actual participation.

Throughout the dissertation, three key analytical concepts, mobility, fragmentation, and negotiation, are central to understanding women's experiences. Mobility involved both imposed displacement and deliberate movement across regions. Fragmentation affected kinship and

identity but also allowed for new connections. Negotiation described women's interactions with overlapping systems of power, including slavery, missionary discipline, and colonial institutions.

These processes also helped shape a broader sense of collective belonging. The emergence of a shared Yoruba identity was not merely a reflection of an existing cultural unity but a result of historical interactions, warfare, displacement, and institutional influence. Women were especially important in this development, serving as carriers of language, religious traditions, and social norms through the expansion of missionary and educational systems.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that African women played a central, not peripheral, role in the historical changes of nineteenth-century West Africa. Their experiences shed light on the intersections of slavery, kinship, religion, and identity, unfolding a complex historical landscape where agency and limitation coexisted. By highlighting women's lives and critically examining the archives that depict them, this research broadens the understanding of African and Atlantic histories. It emphasizes that the histories of missions, slavery, and identity development cannot be fully understood without placing women as active agents whose lives shaped the trajectory of social transformation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

AFRICA (Consular) - Bight of Benin. No. 55, p. 42
Consul Brand to Lord J. Russell. - (Received February 13, 1860). No. 18.

Lagos, December 31, 1859

My Lord,
I BEG to report the two following cases of redemption of slaves; the only cases which have been brought to this Consulate since I entered upon my duties on the 25th ultimo.

The first was that of Moneyakpa or Reki, a female slave belonging to the Balogun of Ilorin. She had obtained the Balogun's permission to visit her mother, who resides at Lagos, and who during her daughter's visit, collected goods and money, which she deemed sufficient to purchase her redemption. The girl proceeded to Ilorin to plead with the Balogun to accept the price of her redemption; but hearing on the way that in consequence of having stayed over the time she has been allowed for the visit to her mother, she was sure, on her arrival, to be ill-treated, she returned to Lagos. There was some irritation at the time on the part of the Balogun, who sent a messenger to Lagos to identify his slave and take her back, but, as the girl would not consent to go, Mr Lodder, then Acting Consul, sent a messenger to the Balogun, with a small present, asking him to agree to the redemption of his slave, in order that she might remain at Lagos with her mother, to name a reasonable sum and to send a messenger to receive it. The Balogun agreed to this, named twelve bags of cowries and sent two messengers to receive them. The cowries were kindly provided by Mr. James Markson Turner, a settler from Sierra Leone, formerly himself a slave, and delivered over the Balogun's messengers, in my presence, on the 28th ultimo. At the same time free papers, registered at this Consulate, were delivered to the girl, who has then been restored to her mother as a free person.,
I think your Lordship will approve of the judicious conduct of Acting Consul Lodder in this matter, and also of the liberality of Mr. Turner, who has restored not a few of his countrymen to liberty in the same way.
The history of the other case, that of Ohlomo, a female slave, and a native of the Yoruba country, is more remarkable. When but a child her mother was carried away, sold as a slave, and subsequently shipped on board a slave-vessel. The vessel was captured and taken to Sierra Leone, were the mother was restored to liberty. Ohlomo grew up ignorant of her mother's destiny. One day a person came to her native village in the Yoruba country, and asked her if she knew anything of her mother. She replied, she did not. He said if she would accompany him to Abbeokuta he would take her to her mother. She agreed to do so; but instead if being taken to Abbeokuta, she was carried to the Jaboo country and sold as a slave. She subsequently passed through various hands, but at last became the property of Badda, one of King Docemo's slaves, and the husband of Madame Tinnaboo.
In the meanwhile, her mother was living in Sierra Leone, and having heard that Ohlomo was at Lagos, sent a message to announce that she would shortly come to Lagos also, and would purchase her daughter's freedom. Badda, the owner of Ohlomo, hearing of this, and expecting

that he could turn her to better account, was about to sell her, when she fled to the Consulate. I sent for Badda, whom I succeeded in to agree to accept ten bags of cowries as the price of the girl's redemption, and to allow her ten days to collect them. She collected the cowries among her friends in half the time, and, on the 7th instant, the price was paid to Badda in my presence, and her certificate of freedom registered here and delivered to her.

I inclose, herewith, a copy of the certificate of freedom delivered to Ohlomo, in order to show the form of the paper which, with slight alterations according to the circumstances of each case, it has been usual to issue at this Consulate to redeem slaves.

Ohlomo's mother is expected to arrive here from Sierra Leone by next packet, and thus, through British interposition, mother and daughter will meet, both as free persons, after a separation of many years.

I Have, &c.
(Signed) G. BRAND.

AFRICA (Consulate) - Bight of Benin, p. 43

Enclosure in No. 55

Certificate of Redemption

British Consulate for the Bight of Benin, Lagos, December 7, 1859.

THIS is to certify that Ohlomo, a female slave of the Yoruba country, the property of Badda, residing at Lagos, appeared before me this day, and, in my presence, paid over to the said Badda the sum of one hundred heads of cowries, equal to ten bags, which the said Badda did receive as the price of the redemption from slavery of the aforesaid Ohlomo, and the said Badda desires, by this instrument and written declaration, to set free and absolve for ever the aforesaid Ohlomo from all servitude.

I, therefore, Her Britannic Majesty's Consul, call upon all Kings, Princes, Rulers, and Chiefs of countries and towns in and around Lagos, to recognize from henceforth the said Ohlomo as a person of free condition, and to protect her against the attempt of any person claiming and seeking to reduce her into slavery.

Given under my hand and the seal of this Consulate, date as above.

(L. S.) G. BRAND.

APPENDIX B
Transcription of "Abiefu, of Oshielle," *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, 1868, 29-32.

Oshielle is a town about nine miles distant from Abeokuta, where a little flock of converts from heathenism has been gathered under the charge of a native pastor, the Rev. W. Moore. He deals with them very faithfully and lovingly, and seeks to lead them into the green pastures of the Lord's own word, and beside the still waters of heavenly comfort which are to be found there.

Mr. Moore is not only a pastor, but an evangelist, entering into conversation with the heathen, visiting them in their houses, and speaking a word in season, as opportunity is afforded.

A Yoruba house, or, more properly, compound, consists of ten, twenty, or, maybe, fifty rooms, so disposed as to enclose a quadrangular court or area, which is open to the sky. These rooms are from ten to fifteen feet long and seven or eight wide, without windows, and having only one door, which is scarcely four feet in height. These rooms are, of course, very dark, but this is of little consequence, as they are only used for storing goods and chattels, or for sleeping in when the weather is too wet for the inmates to remain in the piazza, or yard. "The court is entered from the streets by a single large door or gate, and the little doors of the rooms open inward into the piazza, which runs entirely around the court. The gate of the house is prudently armed with charms or amulets, among which is sometimes seen the curved or horseshoe-formed iron, and which are affirmed to have the power of defending the premises against evil spirits. The interior court is ornamented with sundry large earthen pots, which are the resting-places of the poultry, and bristled all over with short stakes, to which the women tie their goats and sheep every evening."

Into these compounds the Missionaries enter, speaking kindly to the inhabitants, repeating their visits as they find themselves welcome, and teaching, line by line, and precept on precept. In one of the compounds Mr. Moore made the acquaintance of a woman named Abiefu. There was something in this woman that interested him, so that when he came to the part of the compound where she was mistress, he directed his discourse chiefly to her, while she listened with marked attention. He endeavoured to show her that her idols could not help her, but that the true God, who had sent His Son to save sinners, could hear and help. One day, he spoke of the emptiness and unsatisfactory nature of all earthly happiness, and the almost certainty that if there were any one object connected with this life on which we set our hearts, in some way, probably, by its being taken from us, it would pierce the heart with sorrow; but that whosoever obtained the knowledge of God through Christ should have everlasting joy. Looking at him keenly, she said, "That is what I want; and if I could think that your religion would afford everlasting joy, I would embrace it with my whole heart." Following up the impression which seemed to be made, he reminded her of death, and that, as poor dying sinners, we wanted something more than the world's pleasures, which are sources of anxiety and vexation. Here she interrupted him, repeating the words, "anxiety and vexation" thrice, with much emotion and emphasis. He then told her of what is promised to those who believe in Jesus Christ – the "inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." This indeed would be well worthy of being

reached, and therefore we should not delay in coming to Christ, that in due time it might be ours. She begged earnestly to know how many days there would be before the Christian Sabbath came round, as she wished to attend church on that day, that she might learn more about the incorruptible inheritance.

When the Lord's Day came, she made good her word, and, having attended successively for three or four Sundays, she came forward and asked to be admitted into the candidate' class for baptism. She said, that of all the persons whose history she had ever heard of, none had touched her so much as that of Jesus Christ, who laid down His life to procure eternal life for others; and then she added, "Oh that all men might know and serve Him!"

Our missionary soon afterwards heard something about her history. She had passed through severe affliction. Her only son fell sick, and she had sought help from Ifa, one of the national gods, "the revealer of secrets, and the guardian of marriages and childbirth." This god is consulted by means of sixteen palm-nuts, a rite which has reference to an old tradition, that sixteen persons founded Yoruba; that they brought with them a palm-nut, which produced a tree with sixteen branches, and that such a tree, with so many branches, grows in Mount Ado, where the chief priest of Ifa resides. Ifa is one of the great Orishas – the first being Obbatalla, the second Sbango, and the third Ifa. In making sacrifices to Ifa, she spent much money, if so be her son's life might be preserved. But she was to learn, by painful discipline, the vanity of idols. She implicitly followed the directions of the priests, whatever it might cost her. Her son however became no better, nay, he grew worse, and at last died. The king of terrors was stronger than Ifa. It was a heathen death, without light or hope.

She found now that she had lost her son, and her money also. Soon came another sorrow, which, in her bereaved state, tried her much. A maid-servant, to whom she was much attached, fell ill, and again Ifa was resorted to, but in vain: the maid-servant died too. Thus she had been brought into trial. Her chief comforts had been taken from her, and in such a way as to make her feel how uncertain earthly joys are. She wanted something to fill up the void in her heart, and yet did not know where to find it. It was just then the Missionary came into her compound, as though by him the Lord's promise was to be fulfilled – "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I, will open rivers in dry places," &c.

"When it was publicly known that Abiefu had embraced the Christian religion, many were troubled, because, while she was an idolater, she enriched the priests much by the costly sacrifices which she offered to the gods. Forthwith they began to persecute her, in the hope of turning her from the faith. Her persecutors were those of her own household -her daughter, a last-surviving child, and a maid-servant. But although she felt keenly, none of these things moved her. Her eyes were set in the direction of the heavenly inheritance."

But now there came a trial of a public kind. She was summoned before the Ogbonis of Iporo, her tribe. The Ogbonis form a sort of town-council, connected with the government on the one hand, and the religion of the country on the other. The Ogboni house has three courts, into the third or innermost of which none, except the initiated, may enter, under pain of death. What

is done there in its secrecy, what dread punishments inflicted, no one knows, but the Ogbonis are feared by the mightiest men in the land.

These men had been vexed to hear that she had given up her old faith, and they determined to do all they could to prevent her becoming a Christian. It was a solemn ordeal this through which she had to pass. But she knew now where to look for help. Of old she had been alone in her trouble, and she went, not knowing what might befal her, but now she went trusting in the Lord. They asked her what she had found in the Christian religion of such value, as to give up for the sake of it the religion of her ancestors. Her answer was –"I have found light, peace, and hope for the future, which I have uot found in our ancestral faith." "Very well," they said, "keep what you have found to yourself, remain quiet in your house, and go no more to the Christian place of worship." She made them no answer, but was silent. She had made up her mind as to what she would do, but she resolved not to say it, but to do it.

The day came. Abiefu had made all her arrangements. The feast was to go on, but she herself did not purpose being present, when, to the consternation of all the Christians at Oshielle, a message came from the Ogbonis to say that she must come and deliver the feast herself, and that, unless she did so, it would not be accepted. As the providing of the feast was a punishment inflicted on her for renouncing the faith of her ancestors, there was every reason to fear that this summons on her for personal attendance boded no good, and that some evil was intended to her. What could be done to help her? God could help her; man could not. It was agreed, therefore, among the Christians, that prayer and supplication should be offered to Almighty God that the danger might be averted, or that, if the worst came, she might remain stedfast in the faith. They remind us -these African Christians- of the church in the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter lay fast bound in prison, and prayer was made without ceasing unto God for him.

Abiefu set out for Abeokuta. Several days passed over, and nothing was heard of her. Anxiety on her behalf became great, and prayer became more fervent. From her family all they could learn was, that she was well, and that the Ogbonis had accepted the feast at her hands, but whether she had sacrificed her faith before the feast was accepted, this they could not ascertain. That this was the object which the Ogbonis had in view, when they insisted on her being present, was well known.

When they least hoped for it, Abiefu came back, uninjured in every way, her faith unbroken, and yet without having had to endure personal violence. It was a trying moment when she appeared before the Ogbonis. She was hard pressed, and as she had resolved, whatever it might cost her, not to deny the Lord that bought her, it was impossible to say to what their exasperation might lead. The poor woman did feel her need of help, and help was raised up to her of God from a quarter wholly unexpected. A nephew of hers, who had been of the number of her persecutors, rose in the council to speak in her behalf. Addressing the Ogbonis, he desired that she should be let alone, seeing she was an aged woman, who had long served the gods of her ancestors; and no doubt, had she found them serviceable to her, she would not have left them; so they troubled her no more.

Abiefu acknowledged with gratitude the Lord's goodness in putting it into the mind of her nephew to speak for her; and the Christians at Oshielle read in this His answer to their prayers; and thus all has worked for the confirmation of their faith and the establishment of the infant church.

APPENDIX C

Transcription of Ogunyomi and her mother, Lucy Fagbeade's story on Anna Hinderer Book

Mrs. Hinderer notes in her journal for May 6, "Ogunyomi finds her mother." The story of both mother and child was written in German for children, and from it the following account is gathered:-

In 1854, a war broke out between Ibadan and Efon. Until that time Ogunyomi was a happy child at home, living in peace with her father, mother, and two brothers, in the town of Efon. When the war began, all the able-bodied men were compelled to join the army, and amongst them was Ogunyomi's father. He was never heard of again, and most probably had fallen in battle. His town was destroyed, the men and youths were killed; and the women and children, after wandering about in despair and misery, were taken prisoners, and sold for slaves. A few, stronger than the rest, contrived to escape into the bush, and amongst them were Ogunyomi and her mother. Fear drove them farther and farther. Their only food was roots and leaves. When they had threaded their way for two or three days through the dark and pathless thicket, they began to hope that they were safe from their enemies. But they were afraid to speak above a whisper, lest they should be heard and overtaken. Exhausted with hunger and fatigue, they a t last lay down to rest, under the shelter of a great tree. At once two men sprang upon them, one seized the mother, and the other the child. Their tears and entreaties were useless, they were torn from each other, and hurried off in different directions. The little girl, who was only seven years old, was taken to Ibadan, and put up for sale in the market. A Christian man, who himself had once been a slave, touched by her sorrowful face, took her in his arms, and tried to comfort her. Hearing that she was soon to be taken down to the coast and stowed away in a slave ship, he longed to purchase her and set her free; but it was beyond his power. He therefore went to the mission-house, told her sad story to Mr. and Mrs. Hinderer, and entreated them to redeem her. They gladly gave him money for her ransom, and in a few minutes the kind-hearted man brought the little girl to he new home. The poor child had never before seen a white face, and she screamed with terror when she found herself in the presence of the missionaries. The other children in the compound gathered round her, and told her how happy they were, and that all who lived in the mission-house were safe from slavery. She soon learned, herself, to love her "white mother," and was constantly found at her side. When strangers came to the house, she clung closely to her, fearing lest they should carry her away. But her great delight was to sit on the floor near to Mrs. Hinderer, and puzzle over the alphabet, or the still greater mysteries of needle and thread. Singing was a pleasure to her, and she quickly learned simple prayers and easy texts. She was a child of a happy disposition, and often her hearty laugh rang through the compound. But a change came over her. Her laugh was heard no more, and her countenance was sad and troubled. Mrs. Hinderer asked, "What is the matter, Ogunyomi? Is any one unkind to you?" "Oh, no," she said quickly. "Then what makes you sad?" She burst into tears, and sobbed out, "Iya mi, iya mi!" - "My mother, my mother!" Mrs. Hinderer tried to comfort her, and

promised to have a diligent search made for her mother. But, in a large town of more than a hundred thousand people, this was no easy task, especially as slaves usually received a new name; besides which, it was not known whether the poor woman was in Ibadan, or had been carried away to some other place. Meanwhile she said to Ogunyomi, "You have learned to pray to God, He loves to receive the prayers of little children. Pray to Him, if it be His will, to restore your mother to you." From that time forward, to all her prayers she added the simple petition, "O God, give me back my mother." Ogunyomi gradually became happier, but there was still an expression of sorrow upon her face, stamped there by her longing for her lost mother.
When she had lived about six months in the mission-house, she went one morning, as usual, with the other little girls, to draw water from the neighbouring brook. The children were laughing and playing together, when a woman passed by, and, being attracted by the unusual sight of their white clothes, she stood still for a moment, and watched them as they played. One voice appeared to be familiar to her. She raised the basket from her head, placed it on the ground, and listened attentively. Yes, it was her child's voice! Trembling in every limb, she cried out "Ogunyomi!" Ogunyomi turned round, stared for a long time at the woman, and then, with the cry "My mother, my mother!" threw herself into her arms. The other children ran to the house, exclaiming "Ogunyomi has found her mother!" It was difficult to believe the joyful news. The poor woman was at first afraid of the white people; but when she heard from Ogunyomi how kind and good they were, and that they had rescued her from slavery, she was at a loss for words wherewith to express her joy and gratitude. She threw herself on the ground and sobbed aloud. When he mind was somewhat more composed, she listened with interest to the story of her child, and then explained that she herself had been sold for a slave in Ibadan, but that happily she had been bought by a kind master. She was obliged to hurry away, but she was comforted by the thought of Ogunyomi's happiness, and rejoiced in the prospect of being able to see her, whenever she might have permission from her master.

Ogunyomi's heart that night overflowed with gratitude to God, who had so graciously heard and answered her prayers.

For many weeks all went on well. The mother often came to see her child. Then her visits ceased, without any explanation. Mr. and Mrs. Hinderer were troubled for the child, and , after much enquiry, they discovered that the mother was seriously ill, and that all hope of her recovery was gone. For Ogunyomi's sake they paid the poor woman's ransom, and removed her to the mission-house. For ten months she was nursed and cared for by these new friends, and then, to the joy of all, especially of her own child, she recovered. When her health was sufficiently re-established, she was employed as cook for the children, and found much happiness in the altered circumstances of her life.

June 20th [1867] ...In the midst of all this noise and confusion, these dark and evil doings, our dear Lucy Fagbeade, Ogunyomi's mother, fell asleep in Jesus. She was a very sincere woman, who extremely disliked much talking and noise about things in religion. On the third day before her death, some of the Christians gathered round her, and asked what she saw. Poor Lucy was

vexed, and spoke roughly, ‘I see nothing,’ and again, ‘I shall see when I have done with earth, and not till then.’ Afterwards, when alone with me, she said, ‘Oh, Iya, I have no faith in what people say they can see, all my hope is in the blood of Jesus to wash me clean; I can only go behind Jesus, and beg Him to beg God for me,’ and she covered her face with her hands, as if she would hide herself then and there.... Eleven years ago we redeemed her from slavery, when she was apparently sick unto death, that her child might nurse her, and soothe her dying hours; and God has spared her eleven years, and redeemed her soul by the precious blood of Christ, and has now taken he to dwell with Him for ever.

Source: Anna Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country. Memorials of Anna Hinderer, wife of the Rev. David Hinderer, C. M. S. Missionary in Western Africa*. Edited by C.A. and D. Hone, with an Introduction by Richard B. Hone, M.A. Piccadilly. The Religious Track Society. 1872, 143-47, 292-93.

APPENDIX D
European Female Missionaries

List of Missionaries/clergy in the Missionaries Registers from the Yoruba and Niger Mission

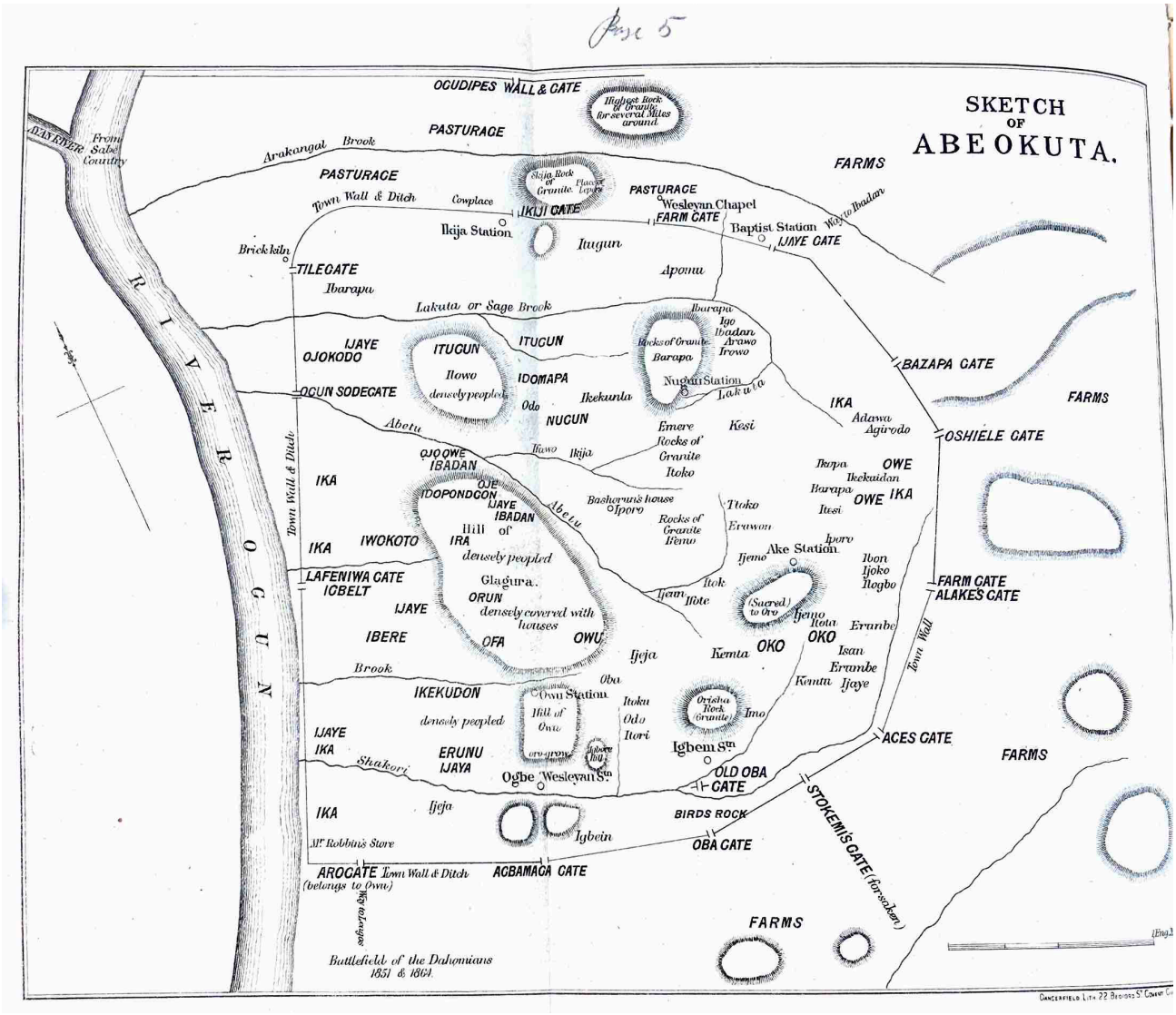
Name	Age	Dates Reg.	Position	Origin	Dates	Mission	Marriage/ Husband
Apthorpe, (Ellen)		1852	Formerly Infant Schoolmistress	Of England	1852, Dec. 5	accompanied Rev. R.C. and Mrs. Paley (n. 449, List I) to Abeokuta	
Boyd, Annette Jamienson		1879	Deaconess, Mildmay	Of Wanstead	1879, oct. 18	to Lagos, as Assistant in the Female Institution	1880, March 30. Rev. V. Faulkener (n. 598, list 1)
Kerr, Mrs. Emma.-		1885	Female Institution, Lagos	Of Holloway	1884, Dec. 16	Accepted by CMS; 1885, Jan. 10 to Yoruba Mission, for charge of Female Instn. Lagos	Sept. 10 1885. Rev. T. Harding (n. 979, list I)
Littlewood, Letitia Mary-		1885	Female Institution, Lagos	Of Liverpool	1885, July 7	Accepted by CMS; Oct. 17, to Yoruba Mission for charge of Female Instn. Lagos	
Bisset, Helen Hird	Age 23	1885	Engaged in Home Mission work, three years' training at Training Home, Clapham.	B. at Crachie, Forfarshire	1885, Dec. 8	Accepted by CMS; Dec. 23 to W. Africa Mission to assist Miss Ansell (n. 91) in Annie Walsh Memorial Instn. S. Leone	
Kendall, Mary Elizabeth	Age 27	1886		Of St. Thomas' Vicarage, Stafford.	1886, may 16	Accepted by CMS; Feb. 27 to Yoruba Mission, for Female Instn. Lagos	
Krusé, Eliza	Age 38	1886	Engaged in Education	Of Margaret	1886, may 18	Accepted by CMS; Nov. 3, to Yoruba Mission - Lagos; Female	1888, Oct. 30, Rev. J. Vernall (n. 1033, list I)

						Instn. Daughter of n. 110, list I	
Goodall, Marion	Age 38	1888	Prin. Of Ladies Coll. at Margate.	Of Margate. b. at Gateshead.	1888, July 31	Accepted by CMS. Nov. 11, to Yoruba Mission; Prin of Female Instn., Lagos	
Higgins, Fanny	Age 31	1889	Certificated teacher. St. Mary's Hall, Cheltenham.	B. at Ambleside	l889, Jan. 30,	Accepted by CMS. Feb. 10, to Yoruba Mission-Lagos Female Instn.;	
Tynan, Mary Josephine.-	Age 44	1889		b. at Longford, Ireland	1889, July 16	Accepted by CMS. Oct. 19, to Yoruba Mission - Abeokuta	
Wright, Aimée Laura	Age 29	1890		b. at Agra, N. India	1890, Jan. 7	Accepted by CMS, Feb. 8 to Yoruba Mission - Abeokuta	1894, nov. 2. Rev. Tom Harding, (n. 979, list I)
Griffin, Alice		1890		Of Clapham	1889, Jan. 8	Accepted by CMS as Hon. Missionary. 1890, Nov. 22, to Upper Niger and Soudan Mission-Lokoja	
Thomas, Julia. Jenny.	Age 39	1891		Of Kilburn	1890, Dec. 3	Accepted by CMS. Designated to E. Eq. Africa Mission; but, 1891, Jan. 16, appointed to Yoruba Mission-Lagos Fem. Inst.	
Ballson Elizabeth	Age 38	1893	Salisbury Tr. Coll. Head Mistress of Guthrie School, Calne.	Of Rampisham, Dorset.	1893, oct. 17	Accepted by CMS; and Nov. 22 to Yoruba Mission - Lagos, Female Institution	
Palmer Jessie	Age 34	1893	Private Schs. and Alexandria	Of Tralee, Ireland	1893, July 18	Accepted by CMS; and Nov.	

			Coll. Dublin.			22, to Yoruba Mission.	
Leach, Phyllis	Age 25.	1893	Highbury Training Home	Of Tooting. B. at Waltham	1893, April 18	Accepted by CMS; and nov. 22, to Yoruba Mission	
Mansbridge, Florence Louise	Age 24	1893		Of W. Hampstead.	1893, may 18	At the Willows. Accepted by CMS; Nov. 22, to Niger Mission.	
Hudson, Agnes Jane	Age 22	1893	Highbury Training Home	Of Canonbury	1893, jul. 18	Accepted by CMS; and Nov. 23 to Yoruba Mission-Abeokuta; 1884, march, Ibadan	
White, Caroline	Age 32	1894	1893, Feb. Highbury Training Home	Of Sandown, I.W.	1894, Sept. 22 to	Yoruba Mission	

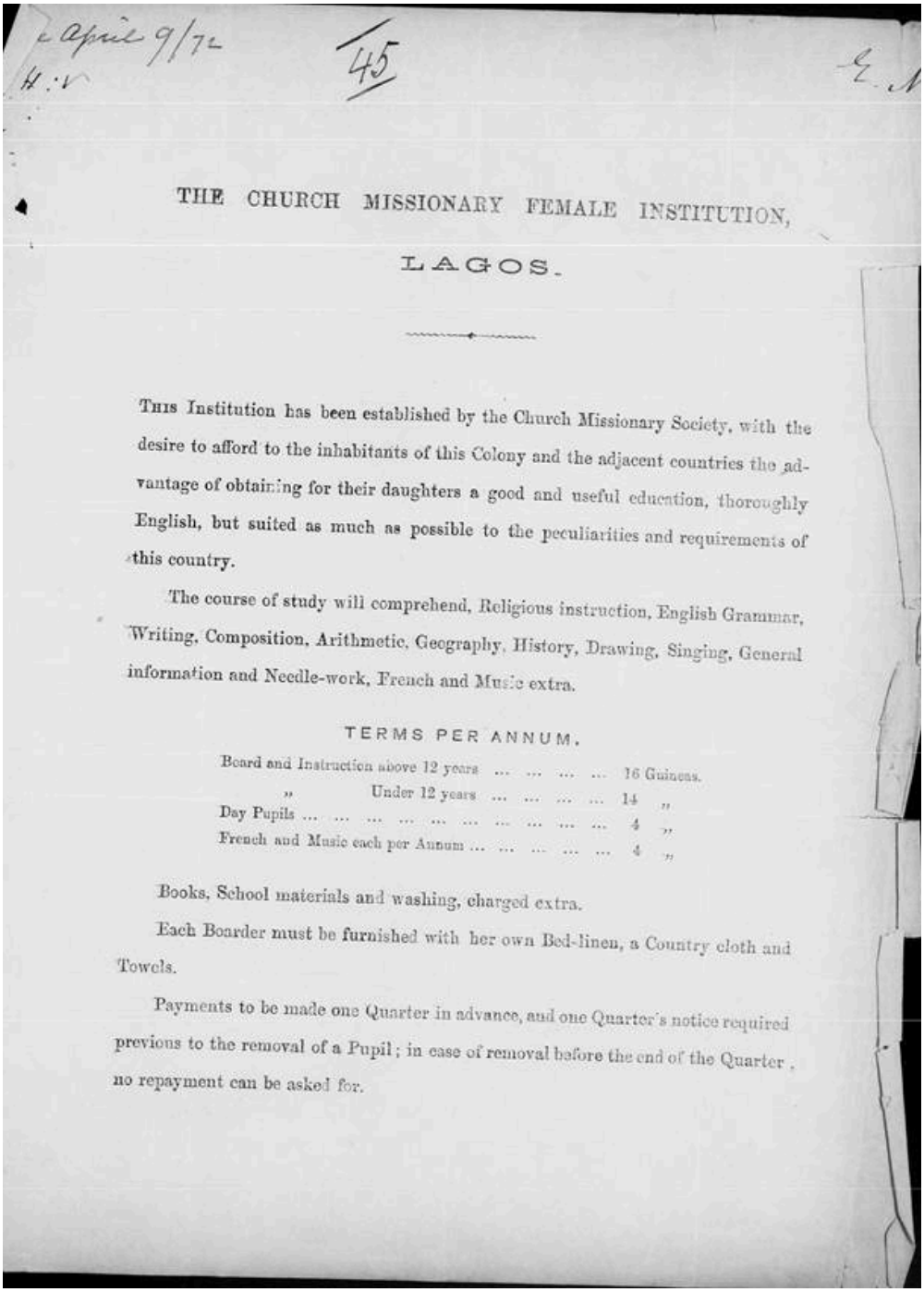
Source: *Church Missionary Society.* "Female missionaries," *Register of Missionaries, from 1804-1894* (Gilbert and Rivington, Ld., s.f.), 260-296.

APPENDIX E



Source: CO 879 15 African n.192. Information respecting the settlement of Lagos, 1879.

APPENDIX F



April 9/72
H.V
45
E. M

THE CHURCH MISSIONARY FEMALE INSTITUTION,

LAGOS.

THIS Institution has been established by the Church Missionary Society, with the desire to afford to the inhabitants of this Colony and the adjacent countries the advantage of obtaining for their daughters a good and useful education, thoroughly English, but suited as much as possible to the peculiarities and requirements of this country.

The course of study will comprehend, Religious instruction, English Grammar, Writing, Composition, Arithmetic, Geography, History, Drawing, Singing, General information and Needle-work, French and Music extra.

TERMS PER ANNUM.

Board and Instruction above 12 years	16 Guineas.
" Under 12 years	14 "
Day Pupils	4 "
French and Music each per Annum	4 "

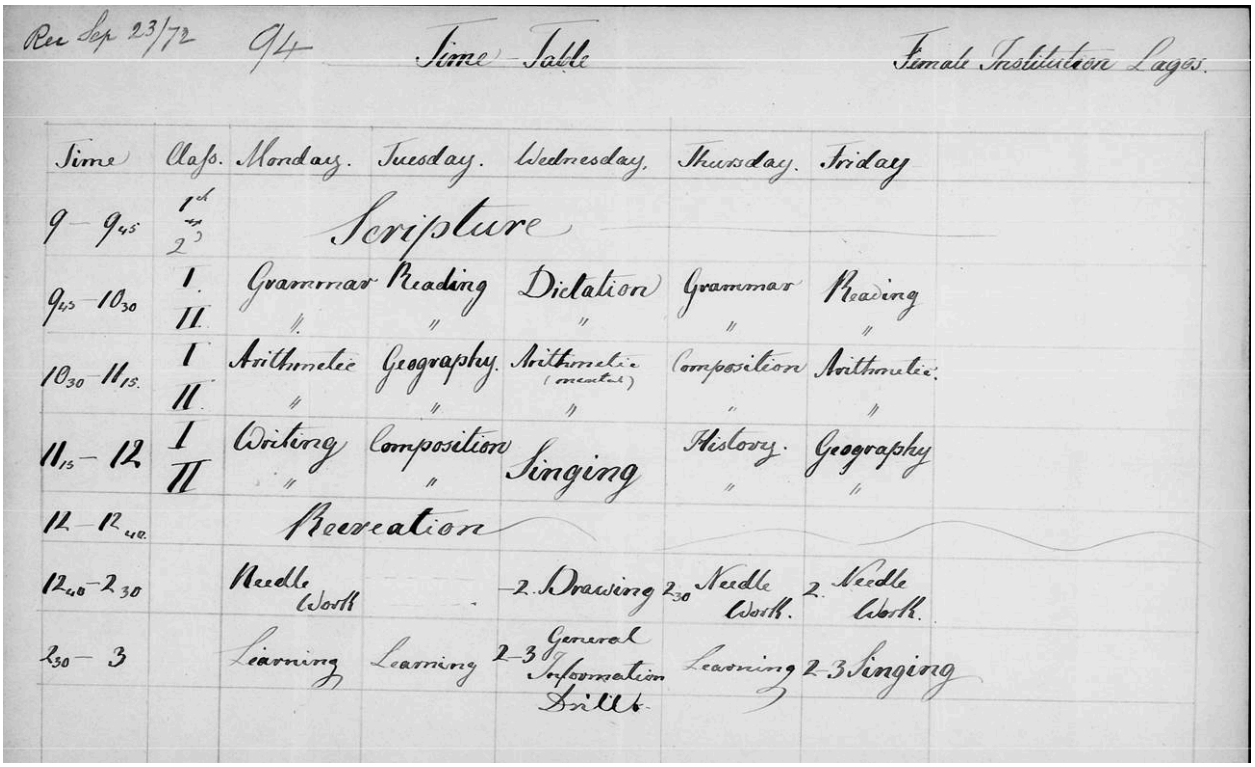
Books, School materials and washing, charged extra.

Each Boarder must be furnished with her own Bed-linen, a Country cloth and Towels.

Payments to be made one Quarter in advance, and one Quarter's notice required previous to the removal of a Pupil; in case of removal before the end of the Quarter, no repayment can be asked for.

Source: CA2 O66 Rev. Adolphus Christian Mann

APPENDIX G

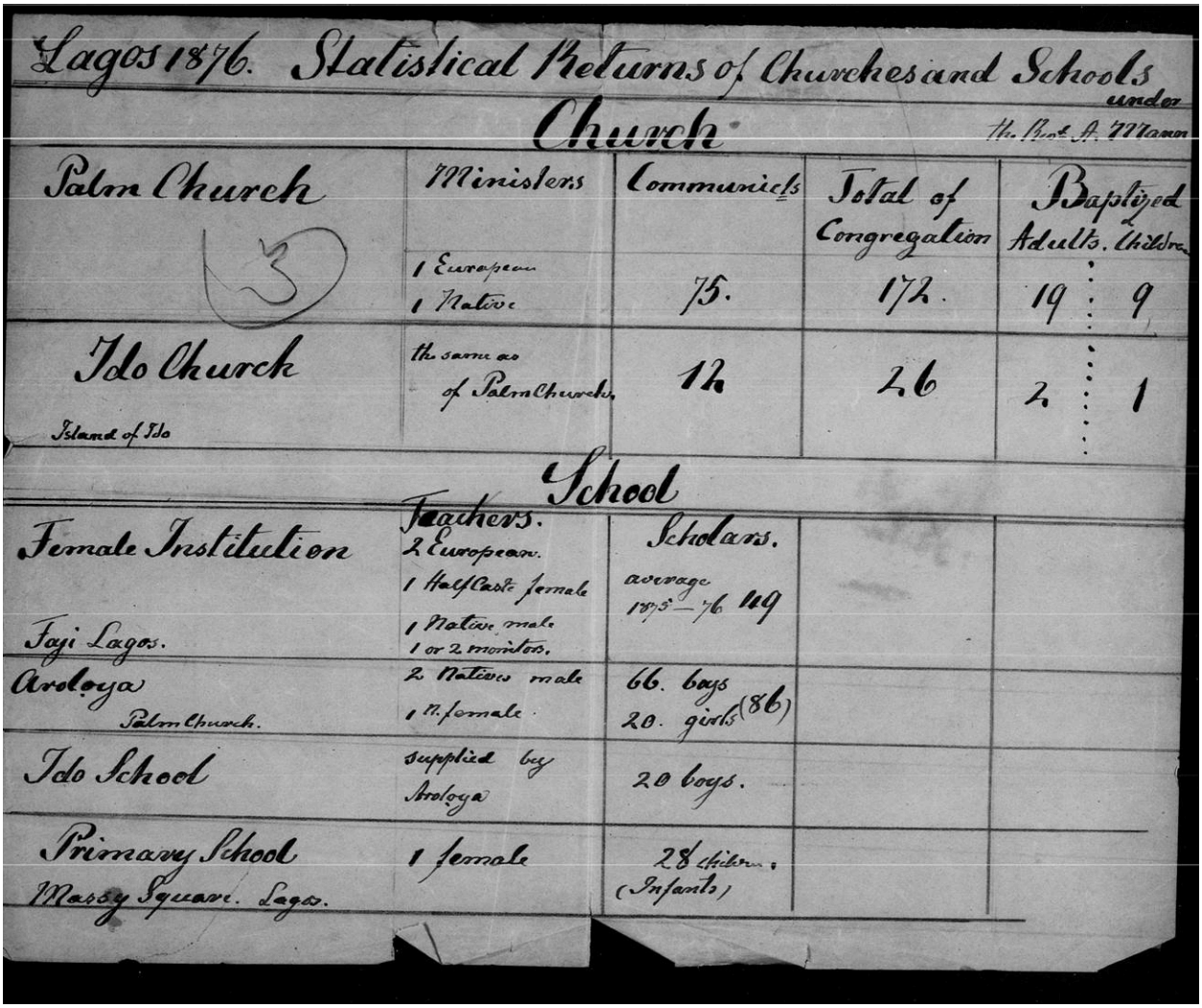


Rec Sep 23/72 94 Time Table Female Institution Lagos.

Time	Class.	Monday.	Tuesday.	Wednesday.	Thursday.	Friday
9 – 9 45	I st II 2	Scripture				
9 45 – 10 30	I.	Grammar	Reading	Dictation	Grammar	Reading
	II.	"	"	"	"	"
10 30 – 11 15	I	Arithmetic	Geography	Arithmetic (mental)	Composition	Arithmetic
	II	"	"	"	"	"
11 15 – 12	I	Writing	Composition	Singing	History	Geography
	II	"	"		"	"
12 – 12 40		Recreation				
12 40 – 2 30		Needle Work		2. Drawing	2 30 Needle Work.	2. Needle Work.
2 30 – 3		Learning	Learning	2–3 General Information Drill	Learning	2–3 Singing

Source: CA2 O66 Rev. Adolphus Christian Mann

APPENDIX H



Lagos 1876. Statistical Returns of Churches and Schools under
Rev. A. Mann

Church

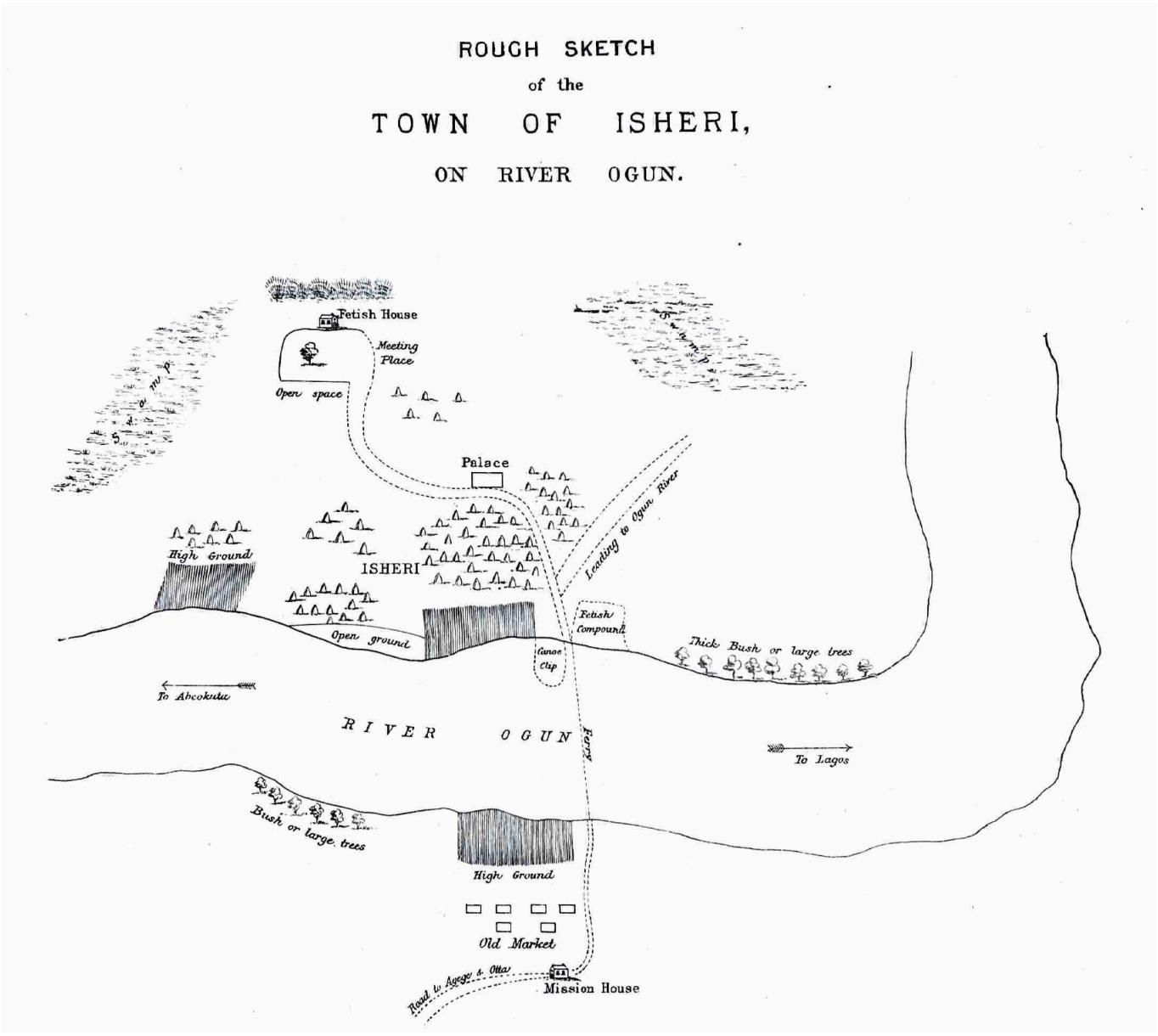
	Ministers	Communicants	Total of Congregation	Baptized Adults.	Children
Palm Church (3)	1 European 1 Native	75.	172.	19	9
Ido Church Island of Ido	the same as of Palm Church	12	26	2.	1

School

	Teachers.	Scholars.
Female Institution Faji Lagos.	2 European. 1 Half Caste female 1 Native male 1 or 2 monitors.	average 1875–76 119
Aroloya Palm Church.	2 Natives male 1 N. female.	66. boys 20. girls (86)
Ido School	supplied by Aroloya	20 boys.
Primary School Massy Square. Lagos.	1 female	28 Children (Infants)

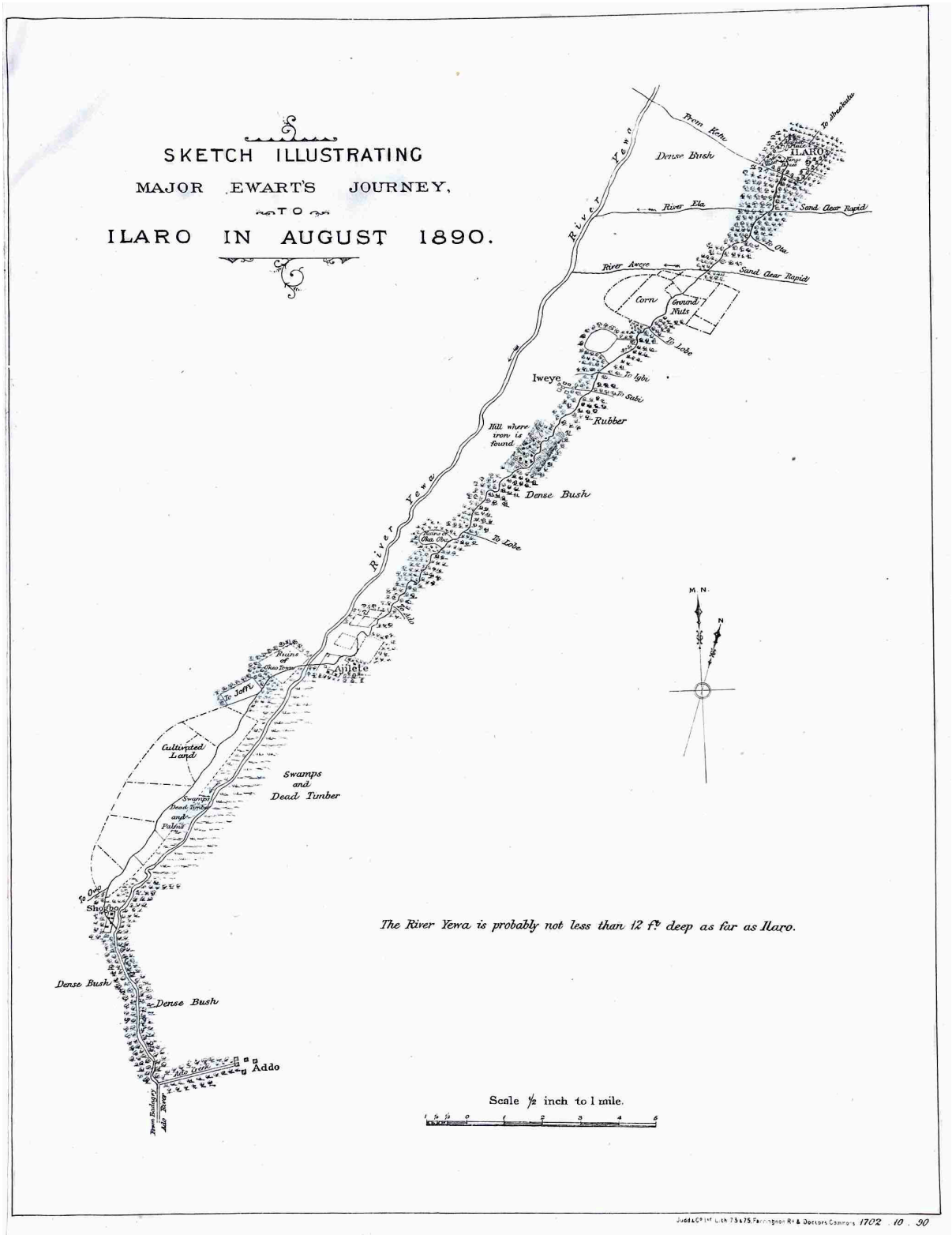
Source: CA2 O66 Rev. Adolphus Christian Mann

APPENDIX I



Source: MPGG 40. Removed from CO 806 334, 178 +179

APPENDIX J



Source: MPGG 40. Removed from 806 334, 192+193. See the location of Ilaro in maps 3.13 and 3.14.