

“HERE IN THE QUEEN’S TERRITORY, EVERY MAN AND WOMAN ARE FREE”:  
SLAVERY AND THE LIVES OF THE ENSLAVED IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY  
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## ABSTRACT

In the late eighteenth century, the British colony of Sierra Leone was founded as a settlement for self-emancipated slaves from the American South via Nova Scotia. Yet, the practice of slavery persisted in the colony and its hinterlands throughout the entire nineteenth century. Since colonial administrations were unable or unwilling to eradicate slavery, the responsibility of emancipation often fell to the enslaved themselves. This dissertation concentrates on the records of over 1100 fugitive slaves who fled their masters and claimed their freedom in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. This documentation is found in the Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1874 to 1894, which features the largest, most comprehensive, and longest continued record of self-liberated slaves from the regions of Sierra Leone during the entire nineteenth century. Drawing on the Registers of Escaped Slaves, this study foregrounds the identities and experiences of hundreds of formerly enslaved people to emphasize how vast, impersonal processes, like slavery and slave trading, were transformed, endured, and *lived* by real human beings.

My analysis of these ledgers addresses three major concerns. First, using the Registers' records of the names, ages, ethnicities, origins, families, previous owners, resettlement patterns, and testimonials of hundreds of runaway slaves, I provide the first comprehensive accounting of the enslaved population in Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century. My findings demonstrate how the individual identities, lives, and migrations of the enslaved in Sierra Leone are indeed recoverable with considerable precision and at a sufficiently large scale. Second, I rely on these subjects' accounts of mistreatment and forced labour to argue that slavery in Sierra Leone was significantly more exploitative and violent than we previously understood. I not only identify the principal forms of abuse suffered by enslaved people, but I also uncover the specific

work they conducted to reveal the centrality of slave labour in Sierra Leone's urban, rural, and interregional economies. Lastly, this project contributes to the re-emerging biographical trend in the study of slavery in Africa, the African Diaspora, and the modern Atlantic World by emphasizing the strategies, movements, and overall resolve of individual survivors of slavery.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In July 1885, an enslaved eighteen-year-old named Sandy of the Gallinas ethnic group was taken on a trading mission to Freetown, the capital of the British colony of Sierra Leone in West Africa. He travelled with his master, a Fula man named Momodoo Allie, carrying kola nuts to sell when they arrived in the city. They boarded a canoe at Momodoo Allie's residence in coastal Sherbro territory, before likely paddling well over 100 kilometers north to the waterfront of central Freetown. But this seemingly routine trip into the colony took an unexpected turn, altering the lives of both enslaved and enslaver. After transporting and peddling his master's kola, Sandy was left alone in a canoe near King Jimmy wharf, possibly in preparation to depart back to Sherbro territory. With great courage and little regard for his own safety, eighteen-year-old Sandy jumped overboard into the deep waters of the Sierra Leone River. He quickly swam ashore and immediately ran to a police station in the city.<sup>1</sup>

In the custody of British colonial authorities, Sandy explained that he had been mistreated by the slave master Momodoo Allie and he decided to escape after he learned that “all slaves who came to this place are free.”<sup>2</sup> He was interviewed, possibly with the aid of an interpreter or translator, where he revealed his name, age, ethnicity, and other details about what he lived through as an enslaved person, where he was from, and how he escaped his former master. This

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1885-1894, p. 9-10. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with the following abbreviation: RES, 1885-1894.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

account of his enslavement and flight, along with his personal information, were recorded by the British colonial government at Freetown. Sandy was also brought in front of Police Magistrate Edwin Adolphus, who read the former captive a caution with the following statement: “You have come here and said you have been slaves; here in the Queen’s territory every man and woman are free.”<sup>3</sup> With these words, Sandy was officially liberated from slavery. After regaining his freedom, he resettled in Freetown with Sergeant Cattell of the Sierra Leone Police Force, as per his own request.<sup>4</sup>

Sandy’s story of slavery and flight, along with the accounts of hundreds of others like him, are the central focus of this dissertation. This is a study of “ordinary” Africans and their families. It chronicles horrific abuses, exploitation, and displacement, as well as unyielding resiliency and resettlement. This is a history of the victims and survivors of slavery in the small West African British colony of Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century. There exists documentation on over 1100 runaway slaves arriving at Freetown between 1875 and 1894, fleeing on their own or as families, groups, or even as part of large migrations of formerly enslaved women, men, children. They fled mostly from the adjacent urban centers, townships, villages, and other areas near Freetown, while many also absconded from within the city itself or the distant coastal and interior hinterlands of the colony. These fugitive slaves endured the dislocation, dangers, and inherent vulnerability of slave flight to seek out better lives for themselves in the colonial capital of Freetown. Moreover, they used the presence and policies of the British colonial state to regain their freedom, shield themselves from being re-enslaved, and integrate into a growing colonial society. These self-liberated ex-slaves represent the most

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., (n.p).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

common kind of historical subject: those who left very little behind to help us learn and remember what they lived through. The totalities of their lives were collapsed into the balanced, systematized fields of two continuous archival ledgers known as The Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894.

These logbooks are the principal sources of this dissertation. It relies on quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis to study fragments of biographical data and reconstruct the partial and longer life histories of the individual women, men, and children who forced their way into the Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves. This dissertation is a multifaceted exploration of these Registers. It is also a history of slavery told from the bottom-up, through the real people who survived the inhumane practice and lived to voice what had happened to them. The Registers of Escapes Slaves are unstudied archival sources that were left behind by successive British administrations at Sierra Leone – containing the names, ages, ethnicities, places of origin, families, masters, and even the recorded testimonials of enslaved individuals. I use these rare and untapped logbooks to uncover and piece together the lives of enslaved peoples, from their mobility, kin groups, and social networks, to their labour, treatment, and pathways to freedom. Moreover, this dissertation studies and analyzes the identities and lived experiences of these former captives to better understand the broader world of slavery that surrounded them and to demonstrate how enslaved people navigated the colonial landscapes of Sierra Leone during a time of imperial, social, and economic change.

### *Methods and Argument*

This dissertation addresses two central questions: who was enslaved in colonial Sierra Leone in the late nineteenth century and what can their lives and experiences tell us about

slavery in this historical context? To fully answer these questions, I transcribed the two Registers of Escaped Slaves into corresponding databases, with fields matching the categories of the logbooks. I sifted through these computerized datasets to uncover general patterns, aberrations, and other trends that aid in revealing the identities of individual captives and better understanding the complexities of the systems of slavery they left behind. This approach involved close readings of the entries in the Registers, as well as identifying, cross-referencing, and tabulating both demographic and narrative markers. Demographic markers pertained to the identities and specific composition of the runaway slaves, such as their ages, genders, and ethnicities, among other characteristics. Narrative markers in the Registers were the common, irregular, and at times, completely unique accounts used to explain how subjects were treated under slavery or how they arrived in the city of Freetown. Using the datasets, single narratives of slavery and self-liberation can be isolated, categorized, and compared with all the entries in the Registers of Escaped Slaves. As a sample of formerly enslaved people, the Registers' subjects, including their recorded identities and experiences, can be used to better comprehend the broader enslaved population and the general nature of slavery in the region. This includes varying demographic cohorts and the common and unique realities of enslaved life. My findings make three major interventions in the scholarship on the history of slavery in colonial Sierra Leone, colonial Africa, and the broader Atlantic World.

This dissertation provides the first comprehensive accounting and analysis of enslaved people in the region of Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century. Despite a dearth of existing archival sources, historians have estimated that slaves consisted of around 20 percent of the population in the region, with one scholar citing the figure of 220,000 as the total number

captives in Sierra Leone and its hinterlands at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Slavery was an undoubtedly common, widespread, and important institution in this colonial setting. Beyond these statistical estimates, scholars have yet to thoroughly address the individual identities and demographic composition of this enslaved population during the late nineteenth century. Using the untapped accounts of the Registers of Escaped Slaves, I argue that the identities, lives, and migrations of individual enslaved people in Sierra Leone can be identified and recovered with considerable precision and on a sufficiently large scale to allow us to understand in new ways how vast, impersonal historical processes, such as slavery, slave trading, and enslavement, were endured, transformed, and lived by real human beings. This systematic accounting of over 1100 formerly enslaved people not only reaffirms Sierra Leone as a formative historical site to study slavery, but it also repopulates it with not a few of the very women, men, and children who survived its horrors.

Further, this research contributes to broader debates about the conditions of enslaved status, slave-master relationships, and the general nature of slavery in colonial Africa. In the historiography of Sierra Leone, and indeed other locations in Africa, some scholars have described slavery in mostly benevolent terms, with captives living in relatively harmonious, yet unequal, relationships with their slave owners.<sup>6</sup> These characterizations of slavery echoed the

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<sup>5</sup> Allen M. Howard, "Pawning in Coastal Northwest Sierra Leone, 1860-1910," in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 268; John Grace, *Domestic Slavery in West Africa with a Particular Reference to the Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1896-1927* (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1975), p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> This perspective is related to Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff's well-known thesis on the nature of African slavery. Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, eds., *Slavery and in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 4-5. Miers and Kopytoff characterized slavery in Africa as an institution of marginalization. They postulated that slavery was just one institution on a continuum of many relationships of dependency. In their view, slavery was primarily

sentiments of European colonial officials who used the supposed “mild nature” of African slavery as a justification for their own inaction, inability, or unwillingness to eradicate it. Using the transcribed and summarized testimonies of hundreds of former captives in the Registers, my dissertation reassesses the overall conditions of enslavement in colonial Sierra Leone. I rely on the horrid accounts of mistreatment and slave labour found in the Registers to argue that enslaved life was considerably more exploitative and more violent than has been previously understood.<sup>7</sup>

I support this argument about the nature of slavery in two significant ways. First, since registered runaways often mentioned the labour they conducted for their masters, I explore the specific and varying tasks assigned to bondpeople. In the same vein, many subjects also explicitly voiced their disdain at the extreme labour demands of slavery, providing an opportunity to precisely map the prevalence of hard slave labour practices throughout the region. This aspect of the dissertation stresses the labour-intensive nature of enslaved life, the acquisitive

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a mechanism to incorporate slaves or outsiders into larger groups, families, or households. This dissertation reassesses this interpretation of African slavery both later in this introduction and throughout its body chapters.

<sup>7</sup> My argument about the harshness of slavery is not unprecedented. As a response to Miers and Kopytoff’s idea of a “mild” African slavery, many scholars of Africa and the African Diaspora demonstrated how violence, exploitation, and insecurity were central factors of enslaved life in Africa. Orlando Patterson, Claude Meillassoux, and Paul E. Lovejoy are just a few of the major supporters of this perspective. For more on this counter to Miers and Kopytoff’s argument, see: Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Cambridge University Press: New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012). My dissertation broadly contributes to this important scholarship on the nature of African slavery. More specifically, my definition of what constituted an enslaved person is informed by historians Trevor Getz and Rebecca Shumway’s succinct characterization of enslaved status in Africa. They argued that “a person can be considered a slave if she or he is the property of another person (or persons) and can be sold or purchased.” Rebecca Shumway and Trevor Getz, “Introduction” in Rebecca Shumway and Trevor Getz, eds., *Slavery and its Legacy in Ghana and the Diaspora* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2017), p. 5.

value of slaves, and shows how slavery was more intricately connected to the political economy of the wider region than we previously considered. Second, continuing to draw on the digital databases of the Registers, I identify and chart the pervasiveness of the precise and principal forms of abuse inflicted upon slaves by their masters. This mistreatment ranged from food deprivation and threats of re-sale to hard labour, corporal punishment, and forcible confinement. From these first-hand accounts of enslaved life in the Registers, my dissertation redefines slave-master relationships in Sierra Leone and reconstructs systems of slavery that were underpinned by exploitation, coercion, vulnerability, and violence.

Finally, “*Here in the Queen’s Territory*” implicitly adds new perspectives and historical subjects to the biographical trend in the study of slavery in Africa, the African Diaspora, and the modern Atlantic World.<sup>8</sup> Building on decades of research to quantify the enormity of Atlantic slavery, historians are currently retracing the singular life histories of enslaved Africans who were taken from Africa and shipped to the Americas via the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>9</sup> Their research shows the potential for and implications of biography as a method to interpret the

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<sup>8</sup> This approach is thematically linked to the “biographical turn” in the study of slavery in Africa, and throughout the African Diaspora. In their recent edited volume, historians Lisa Lindsay and John Wood Sweet characterize the work of leading historians of this trend, stating, “by attaching names and faces to broad processes such as slaving, enslavement, identity formation, empire building, migration, and emancipation, biography can illuminate the meanings of these large, impersonal forces for individuals.” *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> For a sample of the life histories of individuals who were caught in transatlantic slave trade and shipped to the New World, see: Henry B. Lovejoy, *Prieto: Yorùbá Kingship in Colonial Cuba during the Age of Revolutions* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Lindsay and Sweet, eds., *Biography and the Black Atlantic*; selected chapters in Alice Bellagamba, Martin Klein, and Sandra Greene, eds., *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); James Sweet, *Domingos Alvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy, *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner, 2001); Randy Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

connected, lived histories of Atlantic societies and people. My dissertation's analysis of individuals listed in the Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves builds upon and reorients this research trend in new and fascinating ways. It shifts our focus away from the circuits and era of the Atlantic slave trade and instead, centers our attention on the subjectivities and life trajectories of those Africans who were caught in the maelstrom of slavery that persisted into the colonial period in West Africa.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, this dissertation is both a history of slavery and microhistories of hundreds of formerly enslaved women, men, and children. It is teeming with the ordinary, shared, and remarkable experiences of the Registers' subjects, creating a new history of slavery in colonial Sierra Leone from the accounts and lives of the people who lived it. Moreover, this bottom-up approach to studying slavery ultimately emphasizes how enslaved individuals, families, and communities navigated the legal, political, and socio-economic changes wrought by European colonialism in Africa, just as they did elsewhere in the modern Atlantic world.

*Setting and Time Period: Sierra Leone and its Hinterlands, 1875-1894*

Sierra Leone today is still a relatively small country in West Africa, about the size of the province of New Brunswick. It is situated along the Atlantic Ocean, north of the equator and between the Republics of Guinea and Liberia. Fifteenth and sixteenth century Portuguese

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<sup>10</sup> Some of the prominent works in this subfield on the biographies of enslaved people in Africa include: Trevor Getz and Liz Clarke, *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); selected chapters from Bellagamba, Klein, and Greene, *African Voices on Slavery*; Sandra E. Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Ghana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011); José C. Curto, "The Story of Nbená, 1817-1820: Unlawful Enslavement and the Concept of 'Original Freedom' in Angola," in Paul E. Lovejoy and David V. Trotman, eds. *Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora* (London: Continuum, 2003).

explorers provided some of the earliest European-generated records of the coast that would become Sierra Leone Colony.<sup>11</sup> The name “Sierra Leone” originates from the accounts of the explorer Pedro de Sintra, who visited the region in 1462 and was captivated by the region’s natural geography. In awe of the local peninsular mountains, which he believed resembled a crouching lion, de Sintra called the coast *Serra Lyoa*.<sup>12</sup> The physical beauty of this landscape continued to capture the gazes and hearten the minds of European visitors. During the mid-nineteenth century, over fifty years after the founding of Freetown on the northern shores of the Freetown Peninsula, Elizabeth Melville, like de Sintra, was riveted by her view of Sierra Leone. Melville, whose spouse served as Lieutenant Governor of Sierra Leone, published a memoir in 1849, documenting her travels and stay in Sierra Leone.<sup>13</sup> Of her first impressions of the coastline, she stated,

As soon as daylight streamed in at the little window of our cabin, I looked eagerly out and saw fantastically painted buildings glittering in the glorious light of a tropical sun; and beyond, the lofty mountains of Sierra Leone. Through the faint shadowy haze, their verdure appeared more soft and beautiful than that of the foliage near us, which flashed on the eye with a supernatural tint, and formed a striking contrast to the deep cornelian colour of the earth in the paths and banks of the river--- the whole landscape conveying the idea of a perpetual summer.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Kaifala, *Free Slaves, Freetown, and the Sierra Leonean Civil War* (New York, NY: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2017), p. 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Melville, *A Residence at Sierra Leone. Described from a Journal Kept on the Spot, and From Letters Written to Friends at Home. By a Lady [i.e. E.H. Melville]* (London: John Murray, 1849), p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. Captain John Matthews, an officer in the British Navy, conveyed similar impressions of Sierra Leone in 1788. He wrote, “In coming in from the sea in the dry season few prospects can exceed the entrance into Sierra-Leone river. Before you is the high land of the Sierra Leone rising from the Cape with the most apparent gentle ascent. Perpetual verdure reigns over the whole extent, and the variegated foliage of the different trees, with the shades caused by the projecting hills and unequal summits, add greatly to the beauty of the scene.” John Matthews, *A Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone on the Coast of Africa: Containing an Account of the Trade and Productions of the Country, and of the Civil and*

Another nineteenth century European observer described the Sierra Leone estuary, of which Freetown overlooked, as both immense and “one of the most beautiful rivers in Africa.”<sup>15</sup> Sierra Leone’s waterways and thickly wooded mountain ranges were visually stunning by any standard. Yet, this coast, which enthralled European explorers and travelers,<sup>16</sup> was also once a seminal site in the global struggle to abolish slavery and the origins of European colonialism in Africa.

During the era of the transatlantic slave trade, Sierra Leone was a significant slave exporting region. European, African, and Euro-African slave traders drove captives along local and regional waterways, coastlines, and land routes to coastal forts and barracoons where they were loaded onto awaiting slave ships. Human beings were treated as commercial commodities; they were tightly packed into the ships’ hulls and they were subjected to the violent and

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*Religious Customs and Manners of the People: In a Series of Letters to a Friend in England* (London: B. White and Son and J. Sewell, 1788), p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Masterman Winterbottom, *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone: To Which is Added, An Account of the Present State of Medicine Among Them*, Vol. 1 (London: C. Whittingham, 1803), p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Even though most travellers appreciated the visually pleasing physical geography of Sierra Leone, the colony was also widely known as a location where the climate, fauna, and flora often killed European colonists and missionaries. The colony’s reputation as the “White Man’s Grave” partially stemmed from F. Harrison Rankin’s 1836 account of his visit to the colony. He largely characterized the colony as “a land of miasma, contagion, and death.” F. Harrison Rankin, *The White Man’s Grave: A Visit to Sierra Leone, in 1834* (London: R. Bently, 1836), viii. In 1888, George Alexander Lethbridge Banbury echoed Rankin’s sentiments after his own visit to Sierra Leone. Ruminating on the low-survivability of Europeans in the colony, he stated, “During the years 1826-1835, five governors and several acting officers died or were invalided; and the colony, already stamped as exceedingly unhealthy, obtained the well-earned but unenviable reputation of being the “White Man’s Grave,”” Later, to describe his departure from Sierra Leone, he wrote, “I was at sea, steaming away rapidly from the “white man’s grave” cheating it out of one addition to the thousands already buried beneath its pestilential sands.” George Alexander Lethbridge Banbury, *Sierra Leone; or, the White Man’s Grave* (London: S. Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1888), p. 76 and 289. The concept of Africa as the “White Man’s Grave” was the focus of studies conducted by historian Philip D. Curtin. For more information, see, Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964) and Philip D. Curtin, ““The White Man’s Grave”: Image and Reality, 1780-1850,” *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 1, 1 (1961), pp. 94-110.

inhumane horrors of the Middle Passage. Those who survived the Middle Passage from Sierra Leone often ended up in tobacco, cotton, and sugar plantations in the American South and the Caribbean. British slave ships dominated the slave traffic out of Sierra Leone, with the number of Africans shipped from this region peaking in the late eighteenth century. Between 1777 and 1809, for example, over 70,000 enslaved people were loaded onto slave ships that were destined for the Americas.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the wider region of Sierra Leone was integrated into the Upper Guinea Coast, which was a politically and ethnically fragmented and commercially connected West African coastal zone stretching from the Gambia to Cape Mount.<sup>18</sup> Slaveholding, slave trading, slave raiding, and the taking of war captives as slaves were part and parcel of the social and political economy of this geographic region.<sup>19</sup> During the era of the transatlantic slave trade, slaves were taken down the river systems of the Upper Guinea Coast where they were sold off to European slavers.<sup>20</sup> The export trade also stimulated internal slaveholding, with slaving societies retaining higher numbers of captives.<sup>21</sup> Slavery was therefore a widespread and integral factor of the precolonial societies of Sierra Leone and the general region that surrounded it.

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Morgan, "Chapter 2. Liverpool Ascendant: British Merchants and the Slave Trade on the Upper Guinea Coast, 1701-1808," in Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition, and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast*, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> The abolitionist Thomas Fowell Buxton focused on these consequences of the transatlantic slave trade in this region of West Africa. His publication, *The African Slave Trade*, contained the following passage: "There seems to be scarcely a spot on that coast (From Sierra Leone to Cape Mount) which does not show traces of the Slave Trade, with all its attendant horrors; for the arrival of a ship, in any of the rivers on the windward coast, being the signal for war between the natives, the hamlets of the weaker party are burnt, and the miserable survivors carried off and sold to the slave traders." Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade* (London: John Murray, 1839), p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>21</sup> Commenting on the effects of the transatlantic slave trade at the beginning of the nineteenth century, historian Paul E. Lovejoy writes: "Slaves became more common wherever the export trade was important. The transformation of the political economy that resulted in the more systematic enslavement of people

In the late eighteenth century, this slaving coast captured the hopes of British abolitionists and was the chosen site for the first anti-slavery colony in Africa.<sup>22</sup> After the failed and short-lived Granville Town settlement in 1789,<sup>23</sup> the abolitionist Sierra Leone Company revived the plans for the establishment of a colony at the Sierra Leone River. In 1792, the Company founded Freetown as a new home for self-emancipated “Black Loyalists” from North America. These Black Loyalists had previously fled their slave masters and sided with Great Britain during the American Revolutionary War. After the defeat of British forces, they were relocated to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and then repatriated to Freetown under the administration of the Sierra Leone Company. The Company directors and the Black Loyalist settlers were later joined by about 500 Jamaican Maroons, who themselves were deported by the British to Sierra Leone via Nova Scotia in 1800 after the Second Maroon War.<sup>24</sup> This small colony in West Africa was

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and the organization of the domestic slave trade pushed the African societies involved toward the more intensified exploitation of slave labor. Indeed, the productive dimension of slavery became more important than ever before.” Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Cambridge University Press: New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the founding of Sierra Leone on what was currently a slaving coast, see: Padraic X. Scanlan *Freedom’s Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017) and Philip Misevich, “The Sierra Leone Hinterland and the Provisioning of Early Freetown, 1792-1803,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Vol. 9, 3 (Winter 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Abolitionist Granville Sharp, as part of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, spearheaded the relocation of about 400 black Londoners to Sierra Leone. The Committee purchased land from King Tom, a local Koya Temne ruler and established the Granville Town settlement in 1787. However, after a series of disputes, Granville Town was burned down by the Koya Temne. Its short history is well documented in the historiography of Sierra Leone. For a sample of this historical scholarship, see: Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962), John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787-1870* (Evanston, IL: University of Northwestern Press, 1969), James W. St. George Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1879* (New York, NY: Dalhousie University Press, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> Some of the prominent studies on the Nova Scotian Settlers or “Black Loyalists” of Sierra Leone include: Maya Jasonoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary War* (New York, NY: Kopf, 2011), Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006), James W. St. George Walker, *The*

meant to serve as a bright beacon of the British anti-slavery cause and as a trading post for African goods; its very existence in the early nineteenth century was meant to represent a colonial, financial, and ethical alternative to the evils of the slave trade. Yet, this anti-slavery experiment was founded on a slave exporting coast and a general area where slavery was widely practiced. This first iteration of the Sierra Leone Colony, despite its lofty ambitions, could not simply uproot the region's centuries old systems of slavery.<sup>25</sup>

Less than two decades after its establishment, the colony was once again transformed. After Parliament banned the British slave trade in 1807, the administration of Sierra Leone was transferred to the British Crown and the nascent British colony became the judicial and military hub for combatting the export of slaves in West Africa. Freetown and its surrounding villages also became the relocation points for tens of thousands of former slaves, or "Liberated Africans," who were freed from the horrors of the Middle Passage by the Royal Navy. The identities, experiences, impact, and fates of these Liberated Africans is well-documented in the historical scholarship on colonial Sierra Leone.<sup>26</sup> The suppression efforts of the Royal Navy caused

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*Black Loyalists*. For an overview of the history of the Jamaican Maroons at Sierra Leone, see the edited volume by Mavis Campbell and George Ross. *Back to Africa: George Ross and the Maroons from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> Transforming the long-established systems of commerce, exchange, and social order of the region was a daunting task for the Sierra Leone Company. The strategies and struggles of Company personnel during these early years of the colony are well-documented in "Chapter 1: Antislavery on a Slave Coast" in Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, pp. 28-64.

<sup>26</sup> The historiography on Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone is extensive. This scholarship consists of, but is not limited to, the following publications: Richard Anderson and Henry Lovejoy, eds., *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020), Richard Anderson, *Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth Century West Africa* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Katrina Keefer, *Children, Education, and Empire in Early Sierra Leone: Left in Our Hands* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), Padraic Scanlan, "The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815-1824," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 121, 4 (October 2016), pp. 1085-1113, Richard Anderson, "The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration,

Atlantic slave shipments to dwindle by the 1850s and 1860s. Despite the legislative, military, colonial, and moral victory that was the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, freedom foundered in the colony of Sierra Leone throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade did not quell interior slaveholding, overland and coastal slave trades, and the high demand for enslaved labour in the colony and its nearby hinterlands. The practice of slavery in Sierra Leone persisted over the course of the nineteenth century and would only be legally abolished in 1928.

Sierra Leone in the late nineteenth century is both a unique and typical case study of how the problem of slavery plagued European-led governments in colonial Africa. It is a distinctive case study because by the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, British anti-slavery fervor at Sierra Leone had already lasted nearly a century. But this long period of anti-slavery campaigning did little to eradicate or change long-established patterns of slave use, enslavement, and slave trafficking *within* the interiors and coastal areas of Sierra Leone. Like other European colonies in Africa, many of the colonial administrators at Sierra Leone were unable or unwilling to remedy the problem of slavery because the practice was intricately linked to the political and financial interests of the colony. In the words of Allen Howard, “because a share of the coastal slave trade was linked directly with commercial circuits that carried imports and exports through the Colony

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and “Liberation” at Freetown, 1808-1863,” *African Economic History*, Vol. 41 (2013), pp. 101-138, Suzanne Schwarz, “Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *History in Africa*, Vol. 39, 1 (2012), pp. 175-207, G. Ugo Nwokeji and David Eltis, “The Roots of the African Diaspora: Methodological Considerations in the Analysis of Names in the Liberated African Registers of Sierra Leone and Havana,” *History in Africa*, Vol. 29 (January 2002), pp. 365-379.



The twenty-year timespan of the Registers of Escaped Slaves, covering January 1875 to December 1894, is an important period in the colonial history of Sierra Leone for a multitude of different reasons. During these two decades, which preceded the declaration of the Sierra Leone Protectorate in 1896, the colony was still mostly sequestered to the Freetown Peninsula, which was also known as the Sierra Leone Peninsula (see Map 1 above).<sup>29</sup> Even though the British at Freetown had acquired administrative control over Sherbro Island in 1861,<sup>30</sup> neither this dissertation, nor the Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894, offer accounts of runaway slaves reporting themselves to British authorities stationed at Sherbro Island or its adjacent territories.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, I use the term “colony” or “colonial Sierra Leone” to refer primarily to the city of Freetown and the Freetown Peninsula. This geographic area consists of the coastal, river, and inland countryside of the peninsula, as well as its smaller towns and villages, such as Regent, Hastings, York, and Waterloo, among others. Despite its nearly hundred-year history at the Sierra Leone River, the colony of Sierra Leone was still relatively small and largely centered around Freetown and its surrounding areas

Consequently, when I mention the “hinterlands”, “interiors,” “surrounding regions”, or “nearby areas” of colonial Sierra Leone, I am referring to areas outside of the Colony, which were not directly administered by or under the jurisdiction of the British government. For the most part, these hinterlands were nearby communities on the Bullom Shore, or towns located upriver or upcountry from the colony, like Port Lokkoh and Kambia. I also use the term

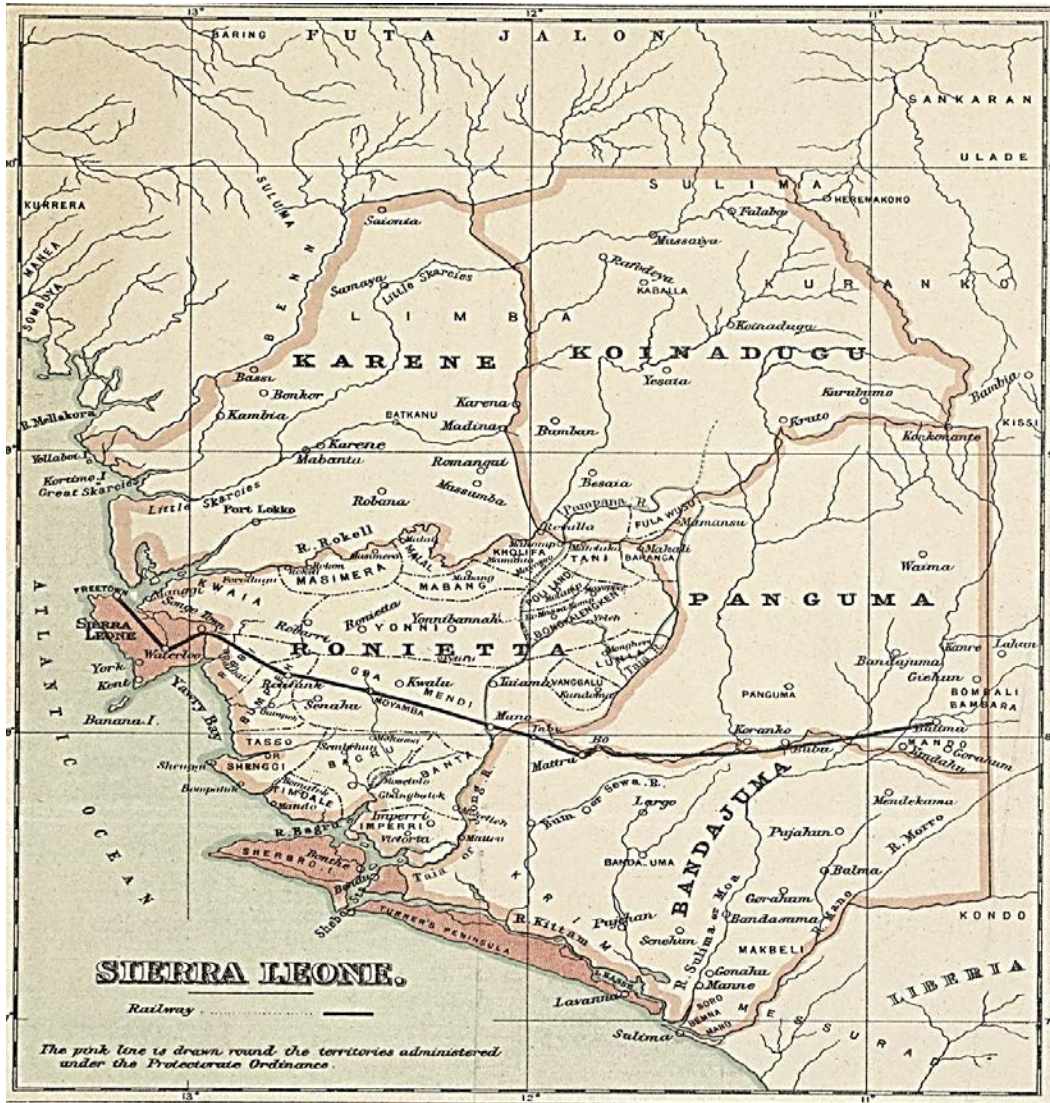
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<sup>29</sup> Today, this part of the Republic of Sierra Leone is called the Western Area.

<sup>30</sup> Sherbro Island was located over 100 kilometers southwest of Freetown and just off the Atlantic coast.

<sup>31</sup> I should note that the dissertation features former slaves who fled or originated from the vicinity of Sherbro Island, as illustrated by the opening story of the Gallinas escaped slave named Sandy.

hinterland to reference locations south and southwest of Freetown Peninsula, such as Mongoro and Bumpe (see Map 2 below). Since Sierra Leone was well integrated into interregional systems of trade, interaction, and migration, I also use hinterlands as a designation for towns and villages located relatively far from the colony. These locations include places like Binty and Forecariah, which were in French-controlled Guinea.



Map 1.2: Map illustrating British Sierra Leone and its coastal and interior hinterlands, or the territories that became part of the Sierra Leone Protectorate after 1896.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Waterlow and Sons. Sierra Leone [map]. London. 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Scale not given. Maps of Africa. Stanford University Libraries.

The time period of 1875 to 1894 is significant for the study of the colony's fugitive slave policy because it was likely a high point of runaway slave arrivals into Freetown and it features the largest, most comprehensive, and longest continued documentation on escaped slaves from the coastal and interior hinterlands of the Sierra Leone Colony. For the first time in the nineteenth century, colonial officials kept a continuous log of escaped slaves for an entire twenty-year time period. Prior to 1875, the only analogous registers of fugitive slaves are found in the annual reports from Sierra Leone that were sent to the Home Office in London. These registers covered runaway slave arrivals between 1858 to 1861, containing a total of 288 subjects.<sup>33</sup> With the exception of the escaped slaves listed between January and June 1861, these short registers do not contain information on the identity of the subjects' former masters, nor where they chose to resettle in Freetown: these details, on the other hand, were always recorded in the 1875 to 1894 Registers of Escaped Slaves. I have yet to find comparable registers of escaped slaves between 1861 and 1874, if they exist at all. The year 1875, which is the start date of the Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894, is significant because it was the beginning

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[http://insight.stanford.edu/luna/servlet/detail/Stanford~6~1~10524~614?qvq=w4s%3A%2Fwho%2FWa%2Fterlow%2B%2Bsons%3Bq%3A%2FDATE%2FCTITLE%2CPUBPLACE%2CCALL\\_NO%3B%3A%2FStanford~6~1&mi=0&trs=1](http://insight.stanford.edu/luna/servlet/detail/Stanford~6~1~10524~614?qvq=w4s%3A%2Fwho%2FWa%2Fterlow%2B%2Bsons%3Bq%3A%2FDATE%2FCTITLE%2CPUBPLACE%2CCALL_NO%3B%3A%2FStanford~6~1&mi=0&trs=1) (January 12 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Historian Philip Misevich provided the first analysis of these fugitive slave Registers. Philip Misevich, "Chapter 10. Freetown and "Freedom?" Colonialism and Slavery in Sierra Leone, 1790s to 1861," in Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition, and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), p. 204; These short registers are compiled in different volumes of Sierra Leone Original Correspondence at the British National Archives. To consult these originals, see: The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/261, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Hill to Sytton Bart, July 13, 1858, The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/264, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Fitzjames to the Duke of Newcastle, August 19, 1859, The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, CO 267/267, Fitzjames to the Duke of Newcastle, August 27, 1860, The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, Sierra Leone Correspondence, CO 267/271, Hill to the Duke of Newcastle, July 18, 1861.

of the first sustained, yearly recordings of runaway slave arrivals at Freetown, spanning approximately thirty different government administrations.<sup>34</sup> To put it simply, 1875 marks the beginning of what may be the rarest and richest documentation on self-liberated slaves in the archival record for Sierra Leone.

Moreover, the decision to end this dissertation in 1894 is related to major changes in British antislavery policies at Sierra Leone and the declaration of the Sierra Leone Protectorate in 1896. First, after 1894, Governor Frederic Cardew, on the eve of the Protectorate, implemented ordinances that made slave dealing and trafficking illegal in the colony and its hinterlands.<sup>35</sup> While slavery itself was not officially outlawed until 1928, Sierra Leone's colonial administrations after 1894 began to take a more aggressive role in eradicating slaveholding and its associated practices. Furthermore, also after 1894 and with the establishment of the Protectorate, runaway slaves kept deserting their owners, but they were no longer reporting themselves just in Freetown. Instead, high numbers of runaways began to seek refuge at British outposts in the Protectorate and on the colonial frontiers.<sup>36</sup> In brief, the period from 1875 to 1894 in colonial Sierra Leone contains the most continuous, regularly kept, and rigorously detailed record of self-liberated slaves since the colony's founding in the late eighteenth century. In

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<sup>34</sup> I must note that my estimate of thirty different administrations at Sierra Leone does not imply that there were thirty different governors of the Sierra Leone Colony during the late nineteenth century. I should clarify that multiple governors served multiple different terms as the leader of the colony. For example, Sir Samuel Rowe served four different terms as the Governor of Sierra Leone between 1875 and 1894.

<sup>35</sup> Howard, "Pawning in Coastal Norwest Sierra Leone," p. 270.

<sup>36</sup> John Grace, *Domestic Slavery in West Africa with a Particular Reference to the Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1896-1927* (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1975), p. 91, 276-284; Ismail Rashid, "Do Dady nor Lef me Make dem Carry me: Slave Resistance and Emancipation in Sierra Leone, 1894-1928," in Suzanne Miers and Martin Klein, eds., *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), p. 214-215.

addition, because of policy changes and colonial expansion in the 1890s, it represents the last time period in which the liberation of runaway slaves was centralized in city of Freetown. Most importantly, due to changes in the legality of slave trading, the 1875 to 1894 Registers of Escaped Slaves are also collective evidence on the last significant period in which the colonial took a distinctly passive stance in the emancipation of the region's enslaved population.

### *Slavery and Escaped Slaves in Colonial Africa: The Case of Sierra Leone*

As many historians have shown, abolitionism and the spread of European colonialism influenced the practice of slavery in Africa during the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> In 1807, after decades of anti-slavery campaigning, the British Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act, which banned its subjects from participating in the transatlantic slave trade. Other European nations followed suit, passing similar legislative measures restricting or criminalizing the sale of slaves by their citizens. For example, France decreed the abolition of its slave trade in the Treaty of Paris in 1814. These decisions to outlaw the trade in human beings reverberated on both sides of the Atlantic basin.<sup>38</sup> In Africa, the ending of the transatlantic traffic transformed the practice,

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<sup>37</sup> Historians Trevor Getz and Kristin Mann, for example, focused on this topic in Senegal, the Gold Coast, and in Lagos. For their respective studies, see: Trevor R. Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa: Toward Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004) and Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007). The impact of colonialism and abolition in Africa has also been studied in several edited volumes, such as, Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), Suzanne Miers and Martin A. Klein., eds., *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), and select chapters in Kristin Mann and Philip Misevich, eds., *The Rise and Demise of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Atlantic World* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> The latter half of Kristin Mann and Philip Misevich's recent edited volume explores the Atlantic-wide and global repercussions of national and international abolitionist campaigning and legislative measures against the selling and shipment of slaves. Mann and Misevich, eds., *The Rise and Demise of Slavery*.

volume, and procurement of African slaves. According to Paul E. Lovejoy, the post-abolition period, namely the nineteenth century, saw an expansion of African slavery, increased demand for slaves, and an acute intensification of the labour conducted by the enslaved.<sup>39</sup> Lovejoy explains that as slave trading was outlawed in nineteenth century Africa, Europeans sought to capitalize on the production of so-called “legitimate trade”. This type of commerce referred to the development of trade in commercial products, such as groundnuts, palm oil, gold, rubber, and other items, as an economic alternative and moral counterpoint to the selling of human beings.<sup>40</sup> This colonialist and abolitionist rhetoric about legitimate commerce was utopian in theory. But, in practice, these alternatives to the slave trade served to intensify slaveholding and the exploitation of slave labour in Africa. After all, many of these “legitimate” commodities had already been produced by slaves and exported during the era of the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>41</sup> Lovejoy succinctly sums up this growth of African slavery during the nineteenth century by stating:

Many of the “legitimate” goods destined for world markets were grown or transported by slaves, for slavery had become an integral part of African economies. The end of the external slave trade did not mean the collapse of the internal slave trade. Despite the aims of the abolitionists, the transition from exporting slaves to exporting other commodities resulted in the increased use of slaves in Africa.<sup>42</sup>

National and international commitments to end the transatlantic slave trade thus resulted in an intensification and expansion of African slavery. This transformation set the stage for the late

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<sup>39</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

nineteenth century as slaveholding became more significant, especially with increased demand for slave-produced or slave-carried products in local, regional, and world markets.

European colonial powers began to rapidly and aggressively expand into Africa during the last decades of the nineteenth century. This period of high imperialism, which has become widely known as the “Scramble for Africa,” marked the beginning of the formal colonial era on the continent, lasting in many locations until the 1950s and 1960s. Most of these European colonial powers promoted their imperial ventures in Africa as an exercise in “civilizing” and bringing economic development to supposedly uncivilized and economically backward African societies and people. These characterizations of Africa were rooted in prevailing racial and imperial discourses of the time. Furthermore, these unfounded assumptions were the impetus for European colonialists to try to transform African states and communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> European colonialism engendered significant political, social, economic, cultural, medical, and technological changes in African states and societies. The historiography on these transformations in colonial Africa is extensive. The following publications are a sample of this large body of historical scholarship: Deborah Neill, *Networks in Tropical Medicine: Internationalism, Colonialism, and the Rise of a Medical Speciality, 1890-1930* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), Eric Allina, “‘Captive to Civilization’: Law, Labor Mobility, and Violence in Colonial Mozambique, in Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran, eds., *Mobility Makes States: Migration and Power in Africa* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), pp. 88-125, Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895-1912* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005), Thomas Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 44, 1 (2003), pp. 3-27, Peter Alegi, “Playing to the Gallery? Sport, Cultural Performance, and Social Identity in South Africa, 1920's-1945,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Special Issue on Leisure in African History (2002), pp. 17-38, Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), Justin Willis, *Potent Brews: A Social History of Alcohol in East Africa, 1850-1999* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Oxford, UK: James Currey, 2001), Lisa Lindsay, “Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (June 1999), pp. 783-812, Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Robin

Despite their ostensibly altruistic motivations to civilize Africans and grow the economies of the continent, European colonizers were immediately confounded by the presence, commonality, and importance of slavery in African societies.<sup>44</sup> Slavery, with enslaved people as both instruments of economic production and as economic commodities themselves, should have been an affront to the moral and commercial principles of European colonialism in Africa during the era of the Scramble and earlier. But it was not.<sup>45</sup> Slavery was and is the opposite of civilized

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Law, ed., *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Maryinez Lyons, *The Colonial Disease: A Social History of Sleeping Sickness in Northern Zaire, 1900-1940* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Ills* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), Richard Roberts and Kristin Mann, eds., *Law in Colonial Africa* (Portsmouth and London: Heinemann and James Curry, 1991), Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> The literature on the history of slavery in nineteenth and early twentieth century Africa is extensive. For a sample of this immense historiography, see: Grace, *Domestic Slavery*; Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1980); Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Paul E. Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers, (eds.), *The Ending of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Labourers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Suzanne Miers and Martin A. Klein. (eds.), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1999); John E. Mason, *Social Death and Resurrection: Slavery and Emancipation in South Africa* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Trevor R. Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa*; Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c. 1884-1914* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006); Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*.

<sup>45</sup> Historian Suzanne Miers ruminated on this contradiction of European colonialism in Africa, which served as driving force behind her seminal, co-edited volume on the ending of slavery in Africa. Moreover, she emphasized the then lack of attention given to the problem and significance of slavery to European colonial possessions in Africa. Miers stated “how was it that slavery and the slave trade in Africa, which had featured so large in the rhetoric of the colonial powers during the partition of the continent, apparently faded out without repercussions significant enough to be given much place in the histories of colonial rule.” Suzanne Miers, “Preface” in Miers and Roberts, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. xvii.

life; and in late nineteenth century Africa, it was intricately connected to the cultural, political, and socio-economic institutions and relationships of African states, societies, and communities. Colonial administrators were often forced to exercise considerable caution in intervening in slave-master relationships because the existence and sustainability of their colonies depended on cooperative alliances with powerful, slaveholding African elites. From the early establishment of European colonial settlements in Africa, such as the Sierra Leone Colony, and into the era of the Scramble during the late nineteenth century, colonial governments often relied on these slaveholders as allies to maintain peace in nearby African societies and to preserve colonies' access to local trade networks. As Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts have summarized, slavery was "'winked at' in practice", despite colonial governments' moral and legal proclamations to end it.<sup>46</sup>

Eradicating slaveholding and the internal African slave trades threatened the economic and indeed political viability of nascent colonial projects.<sup>47</sup> The necessity of establishing and

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<sup>46</sup> Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, "Chapter 1: The End of Slavery in Africa," in Miers and Roberts, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 11. Miers and Roberts also emphasize that colonial officials also overlooked slavery because they "were reluctant to interfere with African customs they hardly understood and with forms of property they felt bound to respect in principle." Ibid., p. 17. This ambivalence towards slavery influenced the implementation of and justification for imperial forced labour regimes in colonial Africa, as historian Kevin Grant outlined. Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884-1926* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), p. 4-5. Historians have also demonstrated how European governments created completely new systems of unfree labour in Africa. For example, historian Enrique Martino recently demonstrated how, until the 1940s, Spanish imperial agents founded a kidnapping and trafficking network to covertly supply thousands of Nigerian labourers to the colony of Fernando Pó. Enrique Martino, "Panya: Economies of Deception and the Discontinuities of Indentured Labour Recruitment and the Slave Trade, Nigeria and Fernando Pó, 1890s-1940s," *African Economic History*, Vol. 44 (2016), pp. 91-129.

<sup>47</sup> This problem plagued European administrations in Africa, especially in British colonial possessions in West Africa. In nineteenth century Sierra Leone, historian John Grace also argued that the balancing of abolitionist principles with the financial solvency of the colony led to the implementation of policy that was ripe with "confusion and contradiction." Grace, *Domestic Slavery*, 41, 58. Kristin Mann, for example, outlined similar sentiments in her study on slavery and the history of the British colony of Lagos. She pointedly stated that "when formulating anti-slavery policies, government officials struggled

preserving hegemony over colonial subjects and territories came at the cost of the continued subjugation of enslaved women, men, and children. The centrality of slavery to African societies and colonial states compelled some European colonial administrators, at home and in-colony, to ignore or mischaracterize the practice by looking past its most exploitative and heinous aspects. During the late nineteenth century, including the 1870s and 1880s, European-led colonial governments required reliable and stable relations with African slaveholding elites and sweeping, comprehensive measures against slavery never fully materialized.<sup>48</sup>

From the inaction or passivity of colonial regimes, the burden of emancipation was often placed on the slaves themselves. Captives did so by absconding, violently rebelling, purchasing their freedom or the freedom of their loved ones, or by renegotiating their relationships with their masters. Absconding, which was also known as running away, marronage, flight, or desertion, was one of the principal and most common manifestations of self-liberation during the late nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Small, large, and massive exoduses of runaway slaves fled into colonial

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with contradictory pressures to maintain stability and increase the revenue of the young colony, while at the same time avoiding censure by the abolitionist lobby at home and protecting the nation's international reputation as a leader in the crusade against slavery." Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, p. 160. The challenges and consequences of implementing anti-slavery policies was a main tenet of Trevor Getz's case study of slavery and emancipation on the British Gold Coast Colony during the nineteenth century. Getz, *Slavery and Reform*.

<sup>48</sup> I also acknowledge instances of colonial governments using anti-slavery rhetoric as a justification for territorial expansion in Africa. For example, Kristin Mann also argues that Great Britain's bombardment of Lagos in 1851, and their annexation of the city in 1861, was tied to both anti-slavery campaigning and protecting British access to the palm oil trade in the region. Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, p. 84.

<sup>49</sup> Slave flight was a widespread strategy of resistance used by slaves across different locations and through history. For example, in Sylviane A. Diouf's *Fighting the Slave Trade*, slave flight during the era of the transatlantic slave trade is routinely referenced as a method of liberation and a measure of protection against enslavement. *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003). Likewise, Gad Heuman's edited volume was one of the earliest collections of studies that focused on the occurrence of slave flight in both Africa and in the Americas. It also featured chapters that concentrated on patterns of flight as far back as the seventeenth century in widely varying

territories and cities, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This phenomenon forced European-led colonial governments to ponder the problem of slavery as they struggled to manage, contain, or stop the influx of former captives. Harboring or encouraging the arrival of fugitive slaves into a colony jeopardized political relationships with slave masters and the established social order of colonies themselves and their surrounding regions.

Explorations of these patterns of slave flight during the rapid imperial changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are a small but prominent strand in the historiography of Africa. For example, in British-controlled Lagos during the 1890s, Kristin Mann has described the arrival of runaway slaves and the colonial government's reaction as follows:

One might think, given the labor shortages in Lagos and on government projects in the protectorate, that British officials would have welcomed the influx of fugitive slaves to the colony in the 1890s and afterward. They did not. The government's first priority was now to uphold the authority of the chief through whom it ruled the interior and prevent a mass exodus from their towns and villages.<sup>50</sup>

Richard Roberts and Martin Klein, W.G. Clarence-Smith, José C. Curto, Lovejoy, Trevor Getz, Fred Morton, and Jan-Georg Deutsch have produced some of other major studies in this historiographical subfield on runaway slaves in colonial Africa.<sup>51</sup> They each analyzed migrations

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locations. *Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World* (London, UK: Frank Cass, 1986).

<sup>50</sup> Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, p. 198.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Roberts and Martin Klein, "The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan," *Journal of African History* 21, 3 (1980), pp. 375-394; W.G. Clarence-Smith, "Runaway Slaves and Social Bandits in Southern Angola, 1875-1913," *Slavery and Abolition*, 6, 3 (1985), pp. 23-33; Paul E. Lovejoy, "Fugitive Slaves: Resistance to Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate," in Gary Okihiro and Herbert Aptheker, eds., *Resistance not Acquiescence: Studies in African, Afro-American, and Caribbean History* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), pp. 71-95; Fred Morton, *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873-1907* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990); José C. Curto, "The Story of Nbená"; Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c. 1884-1914* (Ohio, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006); Trevor

of fugitive slaves during the colonial era and across multiple locations in the continent. Most recently, historian Hilary Jones published a new analysis of runaways in the context of French West Africa during the late nineteenth century. Using untapped sources, Jones examined the personal stories and motivations of escaped slaves who used a Protestant mission to self-liberate and protect themselves from re-enslavement in late nineteenth century Senegal.<sup>52</sup> This body of scholarship on escaped slaves in colonial Africa has identified and investigated diverse patterns of slave flight, from singular journeys of freedom to the massive flights of thousands of slaves.

Likewise, this scholarship also shows that colonial governments implemented and improvised different and similar policies to deal with the general upheaval caused by fugitive slaves. In Jones' study on runaway slaves in Senegal, for instance, self-liberated slaves established ties to religious communities and integrated themselves into French colonial society.<sup>53</sup> Yet, colonial regimes did not always allow the enslaved to completely break ties with their former masters. This is notable in Roberts and Klein's landmark study on the 1905 Banamba slave exodus in what is now present-day Mali. After thousands of runaways suddenly deserted their owners, French administrators helped to renegotiate slave-master relationships. This reconciliation called for slaves to return to their masters under the pretense that they would no longer be overworked, underfed, or poorly clothed.<sup>54</sup> This tenuous truce did not last very long and by 1906, French colonial officials reported that slaves had once again abandoned their

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Getz and Liz Clarke, *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Hilary Jones, "Fugitive Slaves and Christian Evangelism in French West Africa: A Protestant Mission in Late Nineteenth-Century Senegal," *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 38, 1 (2017), pp. 76-94.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Roberts and Klein, "Banamba Slave Exodus," p. 389.

owners in interior towns, like Banamba.<sup>55</sup> In British West Africa during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, runaways were not typically forced to return or reconcile with their owners. British-led governments, as Mann outlined in the case of colonial Lagos, granted freedom to escaped slaves, if they remained in the colony.<sup>56</sup>

Just as there was great variation in the patterns, strategies, and personal motivations for slave flight across colonial Africa, there was also great variation in how colonial governments accommodated, contained, or even discouraged slave flight in their spheres of influence. Despite these differences, the historiography on escaped slaves conveys three major and common factors about the history of slave flight in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Africa. First, the study of runaway slaves in Africa challenges notions of African slavery as an inherently benign and mild institution. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, in their seminal study on African slavery, saw the practice as social marginalization, akin to other dependent relationships. And moreover, since slavery was generally mild and paternalistic in nature, they argued that instances of slave flight were relatively rare and that the abolition of slavery during colonial occupation did not typically alter the fundamentals of slave-master relationships.<sup>57</sup> However, the scholarship on runaways in Africa highlights the suffering and dissatisfaction of enslaved people and their use of desertion as an outright rejection of slavery. As the studies referenced above show, slaves fled their owners in locations all over the continent and their experiences appear in the archival records for colonial states. The second common thread in this historiography is the link between increases in slave flight and the establishment of colonial rule, regardless of whether colonial

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 390.

<sup>56</sup> Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, p. 197.

<sup>57</sup> Miers and Kopytoff, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," p. 4-5, 69-76.

governments even encouraged or welcomed the arrival of runaway slaves in their territories. These studies of slave flight emphatically demonstrate that enslaved Africans saw the changes engendered by colonialism as opportunities to improve their conditions or outright free themselves from slavery. Thirdly, this historiography emphasizes and reaffirms that despite the humanitarian and anti-slavery principles of the colonizing mission in Africa, the responsibility and indeed the burden of emancipation was typically forced upon the most marginalized of peoples: the slaves themselves.

As one of the first experiments of European colonialism in Africa and even as a colony that was explicitly founded with an abolitionist-imperial mandate, British Sierra Leone was equally confounded by the arrival of runaway slaves, albeit during a much earlier and longer time period. The site that would become the Sierra Leone Colony was originally founded by the Sierra Leone Company in 1792 as a settlement for self-emancipated slaves who fled their masters during the American Revolutionary War. However, this settlement was established on a prominent slave exporting coast during the height of the transatlantic slave trade. Slaveholding and internal slave trading were widely practiced in the region. Therefore, the spectre of slavery loomed over Company officials and the settlement's self-emancipated residents. Before the arrival of the Sierra Leone Company, enslaved people in the region regularly abandoned their owners and even establish maroon communities.<sup>58</sup> It is of no surprise that the first administrators of Sierra Leone were forced to reconsider the question of interior slavery as runaway slaves began to immediately seek refuge in the new colony. According to historian Philip Misevich,

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<sup>58</sup> Ismail Rashid, "Escape, Revolt, and Marronage in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone Hinterland," *The Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 3, Special Issue: On Slavery and Islam in African History: A Tribute to Martin Klein (2000), pp. 656-683.

Freetown officials faced an immediate dilemma regarding the status of interior slaves who entered the colony. Recognizing their status as slaves was against British policy and at odds with the objectives of the new settlement. But by freeing slaves who arrived in Freetown, officials put themselves at odds with the headmen among whom they settled and who supplied the colony with provisions.<sup>59</sup>

Sierra Leone Company directors were advised to remedy the problem of runaways by improvising solutions that were in accordance with the anti-slavery mission of the colony, while also safeguarding its viability and very existence. Liberating runaway slaves who arrived in Freetown could alienate local African leaders, which could potentially threaten the security of Sierra Leone. However, returning runaway slaves to their former owners violated the abolitionist mandate which the colony had been founded upon. These Company guidelines were ripe with confusion and ambiguity, forcing different directors, and later governors, to adopt vastly different approaches to deal with the issue of fugitive slaves and interior slavery in general. While most governors allowed runaways to stay in the colony, others did the exact opposite. For example, during the tenure of Governor Columbine, escaped slaves who arrived in Freetown were returned to their former masters in the interior.<sup>60</sup>

Fugitive slave policy re-emerged as a central focus of the colonial government during the mid-nineteenth century. As the illegal transatlantic slave trade dwindled, Freetown officials turned their attention to interior slavery and slave dealing in the colony and its immediate hinterlands. In the 1850s, the colonial government learned that Liberated African children were

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<sup>59</sup> Misevich, "Chapter 10. Freetown and "Freedom?"", p. 190.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 190-191. During the first decades of the colony, the governors of Sierra Leone also relied on improvisation as they oversaw the interdiction of the transatlantic slave trade and the resettlement of Liberated Africans at Freetown after 1807. The history of how the early British leaders of Sierra Leone interpreted and adopted anti-slavery legislation, particularly the 1807 Slave Trade Act, is a major focus of historian Padraic X. Scanlan's recent monograph, *Freedom's Debtors*.

being kidnapped in Freetown and trafficked into the interiors of Sierra Leone.<sup>61</sup> In response, Governor Kennedy introduced the “Alien Children” ordinance in 1854, which required anyone under the age of twenty-one to register with colonial authorities within 24 hours of entering the colony.<sup>62</sup> As part of this more hard-lined approach to deal with the problem of slavery at Sierra Leone and to track individuals entering and leaving the colony, Kennedy also ordered the production of short registers of fugitive slaves who absconded to Freetown. These ledgers were reproduced in the annual reports for the colony and were the precursors to the 1875 to 1894 Registers of Escaped Slaves.<sup>63</sup> As Misevich outlined, between 1858 and 1861, a total of 288 runaways self-liberated in Freetown, with 117 arriving in 1858 alone. He also briefly tabulated the ethnic composition and gender ratio of this dataset of runaways. In particular, he demonstrated the considerable presence of both males and females among the sample of runaways, as well as the predominance of Temne and Mende subjects.<sup>64</sup> By studying these lists of fugitive slaves, as well as other documentary evidence on slavery from the archival records, Misevich makes important claims about the interplay between interior slaves and the colonial agendas of British administrations at Sierra Leone until the 1860s. First, he rightly contends that “slaves continued to exploit British antislavery sentiments to challenge their bonds and redefine their relationships with their masters in a changing colonial context.”<sup>65</sup> And secondly, he emphasizes that even in an ostensibly anti-slavery colony like Sierra Leone, slavery, slave

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<sup>61</sup> Misevich, “Chapter 10. Freetown and “Freedom?”, p. 201-203.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

trading, and managing runaway slave arrivals, were still problems that puzzled colonial officials. More importantly, as Misevich stresses, even in Sierra Leone, the onus of emancipation was still left to the slaves themselves.

This dissertation builds upon Misevich's important study in new ways, while also contributing to the overall scholarship on slave flight in colonial Africa. Misevich examined the first systematic registers of escaped slaves from 1858 to 1861. My analysis of the Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894 reaffirms the prevailing arguments that runaway slaves forced colonial governments to reconsider the problem of slavery within their colonies and their nearby hinterlands. Moreover, since the Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894 are the largest single sample of formerly enslaved people from within and outside of British Sierra Leone, they add new and comprehensive insight into the broader demographic composition of the enslaved population in the region, the nature and extent of slaveholding, and the personal and shared experiences that shaped the life histories of ordinary African slaves during the colonial era.

### *Chapter Breakdown*

Chapter Two of the dissertation explains the significance, purpose, and implications of this dissertation's central sources: The Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894. It first examines these logbooks as material products of colonial policy measures to liberate and track newly arrived runaway slaves in Freetown. I then analyze the Registers as tools in reconstructing the life histories of former captives and in detailing the demography, nature, and prevalence of slavery in late nineteenth century Sierra Leone. Chapter Two concludes with a discussion of the challenges of and methodological approaches to studying the Registers.

Chapter Three examines the intensity and variation of labour conducted by captives in and around the Sierra Leone Colony during the late nineteenth century. As such, it focuses on the acquisitive value and implementation of enslaved people in the region. Contrary to past characterizations of African slavery as benevolent in nature, this chapter argues that slavery in colonial Sierra Leone was indeed a widespread and labour-intensive practice, with slaves as vital factors in the colony's urban markets, commercial networks, and agricultural production. It concentrates on the life histories of the yet to be studied individuals in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, emphasizing their work, identities, movements, and general experiences to reveal new and acute connections between slavery and the economies of the colony and the broader region.

Chapters Four and Five continue to focus on the day-to-day realities of slavery and the interactions between the enslaved and their masters. These chapters identify, measure, and explain the presence and prevalence of varying categories of abuse committed against the enslaved population. Therefore, Chapters Four and Five analyze the rigours of slavery through the lens of mistreatment carried out by slave owners. Together, they reconsider the history of slavery in late nineteenth century colonial Sierra Leone by arguing that enslaved life was considerably more violent and coercive than its depictions in some of the historical scholarship.

In Chapter Four, I specifically study the most common type of slave mistreatment, the threat of re-sale, which was referenced as a runaway's reason for escape in nearly one quarter of all the cases. This chapter addresses why slaveholders subjected certain slaves to this form of mistreatment, and it charts how slaves reacted to the prospect of being resold to new masters. In the final section of Chapter Four, I analyze the strategies of enslaved families who struggled to maintain the unity of their families under the threat of re-sale. Chapter Five extends this discussion of slave mistreatment, completing the first comprehensive accounting of the major

actions that were viewed as abuse by the enslaved in Sierra Leone. It reveals and interprets the following categories of ill treatment: food deprivation, broken promises, corporal punishment and forcible confinement, hard labour, and issues arising from pawning. Through some of the most explicit accounts told in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, I highlight how slaves were starved, overworked, beaten, and confined to stocks. Owners used these acts of violence and coercion to placate and punish their human property. But for not a few of the enslaved, this oppressive and life-threatening treatment served as a prime impetus to escape and reclaim their freedom in Freetown. Chapter Five ultimately outlines and reaffirms the insecurity, suffering, and raw violence that was fundamental to slavery in colonial Sierra Leone.

Chapter Six summarizes my research findings and discusses the contribution of this study to the wider historical scholarship. Hence, it shows that my dissertation provides new evidence on the history of slavery in colonial Africa and pushes us to reconsider past characterizations of enslaved life in locations like Sierra Leone. This final chapter reflects on the resolve and resiliency of the survivors of slavery, especially those who forged their place in the Registers of Escaped Slaves by seeking out a better life for themselves in Freetown.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SIERRA LEONE REGISTERS OF ESCAPED SLAVES, 1875-1894: ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

#### *Introduction*

This chapter explores the functions and implications of this dissertation's principal sources: The Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894. The Registers were a product of a twenty-year effort by the colonial government to officially record and liberate runaway slaves arriving in Freetown. These logbooks were also part of the colonial government's aim to monitor, quantify, and generate information on the inhabitants and ongoing developments of the colony and its nearby regions. As such, they are composed of the identities and experiences of hundreds of women, men, and children who survived slavery in late nineteenth century Sierra Leone. This chapter analyzes the Registers of Escaped Slaves as both a record of the colonial government's approach to liberating fugitive slaves and a repository of biographical information on formerly enslaved people. It first examines how colonial officials processed and documented runaway slaves in the Registers, including the general limitations and potential errors that were inherent in these bureaucratic procedures. Drawing on the fields or categories of the runaway slave entries, I will also concentrate on what the Registers can tell us about the identities and life histories of ex-slaves, as well as patterns of slaveholding and the broader demographic composition of the enslaved population in Sierra Leone. And lastly, the chapter aims to identify and assess the major methodological problems of the Registers as historical sources for understanding life under slavery.

*Primary Sources: The Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves, 1875 to 1894: Procedures and Processing*

The Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves are two thick, now matted logbooks that are currently housed in the Sierra Leone Public Archives at Fourah Bay College in Freetown. They contain extensive documentation on the arrival, registration, and liberation of 1152 runaway slaves from within the colony and its surrounding hinterlands between January 1875 and December 1894. Together, the Registers represent the most voluminous and most comprehensive and continuous record of fugitive slaves in the archives for British Sierra Leone. These logbooks were material products of successive colonial administrations, who each sought to record and manage the constant influx of former captives arriving in Freetown in the late nineteenth century. While created by the hands of colonial personnel, these record books of escaped slaves were forged by the actions, dislocation, and voices of people who were recently enslaved. This also makes them effective sources to recover the lived histories of slave flight and comprehend the meanings and structures of slavery, especially as the practice persisted in a colony that was founded nearly a century earlier as a settlement for freed slaves.

The Registers were created as part of both in-colony and metropolitan-driven, bureaucratic efforts to monitor, quantify, and generate information on the inhabitants and ongoing developments of the colony and its nearby regions. The ledgers' qualitative and quantitative richness are a product of these rigorous, albeit sometimes irregular, record-keeping procedures of British colonialism. Individuals and groups of runaways usually deserted their owners from areas near or within the colony, with most reporting themselves to the Second Eastern District Police Station in Freetown. Some runaways, however, did not abscond directly from their master's confines. Instead, they ran away after they were voluntarily brought to

Freetown by their masters. These trips were usually trading missions, with slaves charged with the carrying and vending of agricultural goods and other commercial items. Encouraged by the rumours or their own knowledge that slaves could be freed in Freetown, many of these captives abandoned their masters while in the city. Even though most slaves reported themselves to colonial authorities, numerous runaways were also aided by the local police force or just ordinary Freetownians, who often instructed or personally escorted them to a police station or even the home of a government official.

In the custody of the colonial police, subjects began the process of formally registering as an escaped slave in the colony. They were put through a form of standardized interview. Officials from the Government Interpreter House, such as Thomas George Lawson, occasionally attached notes to certain entries, implying that the government's translators and interpreters were involved in the intake of escaped slaves. From the interview, the subjects' personal details were recorded and transcribed into the pages of Registers. For almost all 1152 individuals listed in these ledgers, the government entered several categories of information. The names of the runaways, their dates of arrival, ages, gender, ethnicities, places of enslavement, and the names of owners are listed in nearly every entry. In rare instances, the government referenced the ethnicity or gender of a subject's former master. Scribes also recorded exactly where and with whom the new arrival would stay with as they resettled in Freetown or the small towns and villages surrounding the city. Finally, the last column of the Registers, labelled "Remarks," contains qualitative information relating to each former captive's personal motivation for escaping their owner, as well as occasional marginalia referencing the subject's family relations, resettlement plans, and other governmental concerns. Upwards of twelve unique fields of information can be generated for each runaway.

Along with the formal interview, the former captives were brought in front of a Police Magistrate, who read them a caution and officially granted them their freedom. Depending on the year of their arrival, Police Magistrates W.D. Doorley or Edwin Adolphus recited the following statement to each runaway in the Registers of the Escaped Slaves:

You have come here and said you have been slaves; here in the Queen's territory every man and woman are free, and as long as you remain here in the Queen's territory you are so. But take notice, if you of your own accord leave it you are responsible for yourselves, but should one attempt to take you by force you are only to give the alarm and call for help. You come here of your own will and you are at liberty to leave it: whilst here you have to labour to maintain yourselves and as long as you obey the laws, nothing harmful will befall you.<sup>1</sup>

In both Registers of Escaped Slaves, this statement, which was titled "Caution to Escaped Slaves," appears on the first page of the logbook. Underneath the caution, there were two additional passages. The first of these two statements offered advice to the colonial personnel who helped register the runaways. This passage, which was to be read out loud by the Police Magistrate, stated: "The canoes stolen generally by them to cross over, and whatever property belonging to their masters brought by them are generally restored to their owners when applied for."<sup>2</sup> The second additional passage under the caution flatly outlined instructions on how to register future runaways: "These persons are always taken to the Police Magistrate who gives the caution and then signed his name in the Book of escaped slaves."<sup>3</sup> Aside from the additional passages, the caution given to escaped slaves conveyed several important messages. First, it served as a proclamation to formally free these former captives from slavery. This is most

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<sup>1</sup> This caution that was read to all escaped slaves is transcribed in both Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894. Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1875-1884, (n.p.); Sierra Leone Public Archives, Registers of Escaped Slaves, 1885-1894 (n.p.).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

notably conveyed through the line “every man and woman are free.”<sup>4</sup> Second, it outlined the dangers of venturing outside the colony, as well offering subjects’ protection against re-enslavement. Most of all, the caution represented a stern warning to the new arrivals about their responsibility to work and sustain themselves in Freetown. After the runaways were read this oath, and their personal information and testimonials were entered into the Registers, they were free to relocate to their chosen or assigned place of resettlement in Freetown. Some subjects chose to live with a local official, resident, or one of their own relatives in the city. By exploring these largely bureaucratic elements of the Registers, we are offered a window into the colonial procedures and personnel involved in processing and resettlement of newly arrived runaways in Freetown.

The 1152 runaway slave reports in the Registers of Escaped Slaves are rare and valuable data on the intersection of slavery, struggles for freedom, and a growing colonial state and society. Yet, they are not without major limitations, especially as a tool for historical reconstruction. As a product of successive colonial regimes and changing colonial personnel stationed in Freetown, the entries in the Registers were transcribed, summarized, and ultimately filtered through the language and “official mind” of the British colonial government. These issues, which are related to the production and validity of the primary data found in the Registers, are problematic for a multitude of different reasons. For instance, runaway slaves always reported who they were during their intake with the colonial government. I recognize that colonial officials, especially scribes and interpreters, may have documented inaccurate or incorrect information about the identities of the runaways. For example, names, ethnicities, and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

other personal details were subject to be misspelled or incorrectly recorded. But, while colonial workers were often stretched thin, as was the case elsewhere across colonial Africa, it is unlikely that colonial officials completely fabricated the personal details of the individuals named in the Registers. The significant variation in names, ages, gender, ethnicity, and other identifying information suggests that the entries are indeed credible and reasonably accurate accounts of the real people who escaped slavery.

Likewise, colonial personnel relied on one or a few brief sentences to record subjects' explanations of why they escaped. These summaries of the runaways' testimonials are also problematic because they distort, ignore, and overlook the minutia and magnitude of a subject's experience. In most cases, scribes only wrote short, formulaic, and often vague responses to encapsulate what an escaped slave lived through. For example, the phrases "escaped on account of ill treatment" or "escaped for freedom" appear as the only explanation for flight in the majority of the cases in the Registers. These phrases are imprecise and say very little about the day-to-day realities and struggles of enslaved life, particularly labour exploitation and precise forms of abuse. This problem is symptomatic of the colonial government's effort to record and quantify the entirety of a former slave's identity, subjectivity, relationships, and lived experiences into less than a single page of a colonial ledger. And still, this problem can be easily remedied: it will be discussed briefly in the pages immediately below and at great length throughout the chapters of this dissertation. Simply put, although scribes used formulaic language in most entries, they did not use it in all cases. There are hundreds of runaway slave reports in the Registers that also offer diverse, drawn-out, and remarkably well-detailed accounts of subjects' life under slavery, including their treatment, utilization, and paths to freedom. These subsamples of the more explicit accounts told by runaways emphasize the qualitative richness

and diversity of experiences found in the Registers and highlight their utility and versatility as historical sources.

Even though the Registers of Escaped Slaves were part of the colonial government's effort to systematically record and process recently arrived runaways, the logbooks are not a listing of the overall total of fugitive slave arrivals at Freetown. Slaves were not legally obligated to report themselves to colonial authorities in the city and the majority chose not to.<sup>5</sup> In 1889, for example, the Sierra Leone Superintendent of the Native Affairs Department revealed that most escaped slaves did not register with the colonial government and upwards of one third of the population of Freetown was made up of these former runaways.<sup>6</sup> The Inspector General for the Sierra Leone Police recommended that the Queen's Advocate draw up and implement a bill requiring fugitive slaves to report themselves to the government within ten days or face criminal charges.<sup>7</sup> Police Magistrate Edwin Adolphus agreed with his colleagues, while also suggesting

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<sup>5</sup> There are very limited records to track the identities or trajectories of these undocumented runaway slaves. In 1896, after the Declaration of the Sierra Leone Protectorate, *The Sierra Leone Weekly News* published a short article on the existence of village or "asylum" of presumably unregistered runaway slaves on the Bullom Shore, just north of Freetown. The author outlined the daily activities of this community, which included agricultural work, attending church services, and the schooling of children. While the names and origins of the former runaways were not disclosed, the author stressed that "we learnt that hundreds of escaped slaves pass through every year after residing for some time, whilst others with their families reside permanently and pursue various useful occupations." S.G. "A Trip to Bullom." *The Sierra Leone Weekly News*, October 17, 1896, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/378, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Enclosure No.1, Administrator Foster to The Right Honorable Lord Knutsford GCMG, August 22, 1889.

<sup>7</sup> The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/378, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Enclosure No. 2, Acting Inspector of the Police to Colonial Secretary, August 1889. This push to criminalize undocumented runaways was tied to some of the attitudes of the Freetown elite, especially the Krio press. For instance, in 1894, *The Sierra Leone Times* characterized runaways as aimless vagrants and accused the escaped slaves of joining Freetown's criminal ranks. John Grace, *Domestic Slavery in West Africa with a Particular Reference to the Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1896-1927* (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1975), p. 71. Other newspapers took a more moderate stance on the influx of former slaves into the colony. For example, in 1896, *The Sierra Leone Weekly News* spotlighted

that the government build huts to rent out to the former slaves.<sup>8</sup> By mid-September 1889, the Governor had the final say on the issue but he made no formal decision and deferred the matter to a later date.<sup>9</sup> Suffice it to say, the criminalization of unreported runaways, or Adolphus' scheme to house them, were not enacted in Freetown in 1889 or the 1890s.

However, by cross-referencing the Superintendent's assessment that one third of the population of Freetown consisted of former runaway slaves with available census data for Freetown,<sup>10</sup> I can estimate that there may have been around 7000 recent or former runaways living in the city in 1889. Still, this is a severe limitation of the Registers of Escaped Slaves, in general because they are clearly not an accurate log of the total number of former captives arriving in the colony. In fact, for 1889, only 52 cases of runaway slaves were officially reported. The logbooks, therefore, do not contain any documentation on the dozens, if not hundreds, of other runaway slaves who fled to Freetown each year. But at the same time, the revelation that runaway slaves made up a considerable portion of the Freetown population also reinforces the historical utility of the Registers and the rarity of the life stories that are found in the them. In other words, the Registers constitute a rare and rich sample of both the real people who made up the broader enslaved population in the region and the thousands of runaway slaves whose

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the work and success stories of unregistered escaped slaves living on the Bullom Shore. The author expressed hope that his article would help temper the prejudice levelled against these new arrivals in the colony. S.G. "A Visit to Bullom" p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/378, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Enclosure No. 2, Police Magistrate Edwin Adolphus to the Administrator, September 7, 1889.

<sup>9</sup> The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/378, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Despatch #18120, Mr. Meade to Acting Governor of Sierra Leone, September 13, 1889.

<sup>10</sup> For 1889, the official population of Freetown was listed as 21,931 people. The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 272/66, Blue Books of Statistics, 1889.

personal stories and motivations we will never know.

*The Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves, 1875 to 1894: Fields and Highlights*

Overall, the Registers of Escaped Slaves can be used to uncover and better understand the lived experiences of slavery in colonial Sierra Leone between 1875 and 1894. The presence of names begins to restore the individuality and identities of former slaves who not only survived slavery, but also impacted the societies they lived in, through their labour, social connections, and movements in this British colony and its hinterlands.<sup>11</sup> The Registers broadly offer vital elements about both the life trajectories of these survivors of slavery and the circumstances and other factors that shaped their lives.

The first four fields of the Registers of Escaped Slaves were: “No.,” “Date of Arrival”, “Name”, and “Sex.” The column labelled “No.” contained a sequential number assigned to the runaways, based on their date of arrival. These numbers rolled over each year and thus, can be used to tabulate the total number of registrations for a given year. The “Name” column identified

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<sup>11</sup> Historians of Africa and the African Diaspora have used names to gain deeper insight into the ethnic and geographic origins of enslaved or formerly Africans, especially in the context of the transatlantic slave trade. For a sample of this historical scholarship, see: John Thornton, “Central African Names and African-American Naming Patterns.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 50, 4 (1993), pp. 727-742, G. Ugo Nwokeji and David Eltis, “Characteristics of Captives Leaving the Cameroons for the Americas, 1822-1837,” *The Journal of African History*, 43 (2002), pp. 191-210, David Eltis and G. Ugo Nwokeji, “The Roots of the African Diaspora: Methodological Considerations in the Analysis of Names in the Liberated African Registers of Sierra Leone and Havana,” *History in Africa*, 29 (2002), pp. 365-379, Richard Anderson, et al., “Using African Names to Identify the Origins of Captives in the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Crowd-Sourcing and the Registers of Liberated Africans, 1908-1862,” *History in Africa*, 40 (2013), pp 165-191, Philip Misevich, “The Mende and Sherbro Diaspora in Nineteenth-Century Southern Sierra Leone,” in Philip Misevich and Kristin Mann, eds., *The Rise and Demise of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Atlantic World* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2016), pp. 247-265.

the names of the individuals who absconded slavery in the colony and elsewhere and reported themselves as escaped slaves to the colonial authorities. The “Date of Arrival” category documented the precise date that a runaway arrived or was registered in Freetown. If there were multiple registrations on the same date, it was typically because several escaped slaves had in fact deserted their owner or owners as a group and fled to Freetown together. Former captives often absconded in groups of less than five or ten individuals. In rare cases, however, there were clusters of dozens of runaways arriving on the same day, which served as evidence of large migrations of wayward slaves into the city. When read together, the “Date of Arrival” and “Name” fields of the Registers are windows into pivotal and life-altering times in the lives of formerly enslaved people. By revealing the names and dates of arrival for the subjects in the Registers, these columns address who these people were, when and with whom they escaped, and the moment they officially regained their freedom. These two elements of the logbooks are crucial in uncovering and reconstructing the life histories of the survivors of slavery in the late nineteenth century.

The “Sex” column divided subjects by gender, marking individuals as male or female. The gender ratio for the Register was approximately 1.93 males for every female. This meant that men were almost twice as likely to abandon their owners and relocate to Freetown. It also suggests that the broader enslaved population was possibly comprised mostly of men and boys. It could be equally plausible that women and young girls simply did not have the same opportunities to escape as their male counterparts.<sup>12</sup> Of the 1152 cases in both Registers, there

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<sup>12</sup> José C. Curto, for example, outlines the struggles of female runaway slaves in Portuguese West Central Africa during the nineteenth century. Curto, José C., “The Story of Nbena, 1817-1820: Unlawful Enslavement and the Concept of ‘Original Freedom’ in Angola,” in Paul E. Lovejoy and David V.

were 753 males and 391 females. When this gender category is compared with the “Date of Arrival” column, we can determine how frequently males and females reported themselves as escaped slaves in Freetown. In general, an average of about 57 captives arrived in Freetown each year. The year 1884, for example, featured the highest number of total runaways, which amounted to 105 registrations. About nine years later, in 1893, scribes documented the arrival of just fourteen escaped slaves, which was the lowest yearly total in both Registers. Using the “Sex” field, we delve deeper into these findings. For example, over the twenty-year timespan of the logbooks, an average of 19.5 women and girls were registered annually. Similarly, the highest influx of female runaways came in 1892, with 39 cases of women or young girls reporting themselves as former captives. Overall, the “Name,” “Date of Arrival,” and “Sex” columns in the logbooks are useful tools in uncovering and reconstructing the identities and individuals who self-liberated in Sierra Leone. The consistent presence of males and females among the total runaways in the Registers, in particular, suggests that masters in the region were predisposed to enslave women, men, and boys and girls alike.

The columns entitled “Age” and “Nationality” aid in uncovering and piecing together the unique identities of individual runaway slaves. During the intake of these new arrivals at Freetown, colonial officials recorded subjects’ stated ages and ethnicities. This documentation represents a considerable snapshot into the broad age and ethnic groups that made up the overall captive population in Sierra Leone. When examined together, these two sets of data suggest that slaveholders enslaved people of widely varying ages and ethnicities. They also reveal that

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Trotman, eds. *Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora* (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 43-64.

captives of different age ranges and ethnic origins self-liberated by deserting their owners and fleeing to Freetown.

The average age of the runaways in the Registers was just under twenty-five years old. In 133 entries, subjects stated that they were thirty years old, which was the most commonly recorded age in the logbooks. The next most frequently cited age was twenty-five years old, which was assigned to a total of 131 escaped slaves. These figures imply that many of the runaways, and perhaps much of the general enslaved population, consisted of adult aged captives. However, slave masters were also apt to hold more senior bondspeople, as well as teenagers and small children. First, over 154 subjects in the Registers were at least forty years old; 45 of which were over the age of fifty, with six individuals being upwards of sixty years old. Second, 230 runaways were under the age of fourteen years old. Of these 230 minors, 75 or approximately one third, were recorded as being under the age of five years old. Still, runaways ranging from twenty to thirty years old were by far the most prominent age group. Subjects within this range appear in 466, or about 40%, of the total entries in the Registers. These findings indicate that adult aged captives deserted their owners in relatively high numbers, and that they may have been the most prevalent age group that was enslaved in Sierra Leone. While adults, especially those between the ages of twenty and thirty years old, were a very significant portion of the enslaved population, owners were also inclined to acquire, keep, and exploit young and more senior captives. As demonstrated by this “Age” field of the Registers, people of nearly all ages, including infants, toddlers, and other adolescents, fell victim to slavery in the colony and its surrounding hinterlands.

The column that the colonial government labelled “Nationality” contained the ethnic classifications of the newly arrived runaways. Just as the former captives revealed their age, they

likewise conveyed their ethnic origins as they were processed as escaped slaves by colonial authorities. And similarly, this field was comprised of a myriad of different ethnic groups. For the 1152 entries across both Registers of Escaped Slaves, colonial scribes documented individuals from over 50 unique ethnic groups. The general region of Sierra Leone was politically and ethnically fragmented.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is of little surprise that the enslaved may have been equally as diverse. The following ethnic groups are only a small representation of the dozens of ethnicities found in the entries of runaway slaves: Bullom, Fula, Gallinas, Jarlongkoh, Kissi, Koranko, Kossoh, Konnoh, Mende, Limba, Lokkoh, Mandingo, Sherbro, Temne, and Susu. People from these upwards of 50 ethnic groups were indeed part of the broader enslaved population. But these ethnicities were not equally represented within the total captive population, as evidenced by the relatively high concentration of certain ethnic groups in the Registers. In total, 550 runaways identified as of Temne-descent, constituting just under half of all the subjects found in the Registers.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Mende and Susu appeared as the ethnicity of a runaway in 139 and 48 cases respectively. There were also 47 subjects of Kossoh descent and another 36 Lokkoh. A sum of 22 Mandingo people and 24 Bullom were the other major ethnic groups found in the Registers. These findings represent rare, first-hand documentation on the ethnic groups

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<sup>13</sup> For more details on the ethnic diversity of this region, see, Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1970). Drawing Rodney's study, historian Padraic Scanlan commented that Sierra Leone's numerous ethnic groups and relatively small polities were "in contrast to other regions of West Africa dominated by big, powerful states like the Asante empire or the Kingdom of Dahomey." Padraic Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> The Temne had long been the predominate ethnic group in the hinterlands of the Sierra Leone Colony. According to historian Joseph J. Bangura, "The invading Temne lived in the hinterland of Sierra Leone from where they made frequent forays on the coastal territory and eventually took control of it in the mid-fifteenth century." Joseph J. Bangura, *The Temne of Sierra Leone: African Agency in the Making of a British Colony* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 3.

that were susceptible to enslavement in this context. Slave masters had evidently enslaved and held individuals from a wide variety of different ethnicities, contributing to an ethnically diverse enslaved population. Yet, certain ethnicities, especially Temne and Mende, who traditionally lived in the regions within or near the colony, were more often enslaved than others.

After reporting themselves as fugitive slaves in the city, subjects were further asked where they had been enslaved and who they had been enslaved by. Their answers formed the next two fields of the Registers of Escaped Slaves, “Where From” and “Former Master.” In general, these two categories are reliable resources in uncovering the identities of slaveholders near and within the colony, as well as in establishing the origin points of the journeys taken by runaway women, men, and children. By analyzing these columns more closely, however, they additionally reveal three specific and interrelated aspects of slavery in the region of Sierra Leone: locations of high concentrations of slavery, patterns of slaveholding, and the ethnicities of masters. Collectively, these findings aid in reconstructing the broader world of slavery that surrounded and shaped the lives of ordinary captives.

The records found in the “Where From” column amount to a sweeping dataset on the locations where slavery was practiced in the regions of the Sierra Leone Colony. There are well over 100 different locations listed in this field of the Registers. Some of these places of enslavement are described only in broad terms, typically with scribes just inputting the general area where the slave was held their owner. For example, in several instances, it was only stated that a subject was from “Bullom,” with no information on a precise location on the Bullom Shore. But for most entries in the Registers, the colonial government documented the exact village or town where the subject had been enslaved. The sheer diversity of these places of enslavement is compelling evidence that slavery was widely dispersed within and around the

region of Sierra Leone. In other words, the Registers bring attention to the spread and prevalence of slavery, emphasizing that the practice was not entirely geographically isolated.

Slaves were indeed an important element of the spatial and commercial geography of the colony and its surrounding hinterlands. Although slavery was a feature of these spaces, there were still areas where it may have been heavily concentrated. Reoccurring locations in the Registers of Escaped Slaves can be utilized as markers to determine areas where slavery was likely deeply entrenched in societies and local economies. Soaring numbers of runaways arriving from the same location, across multiple years of the Registers, delineate the towns, villages, and other polities that were home to potentially large enslaved populations. Locations in the vicinity of the Bullom Shore, for example, repeatedly appear as the origin points for the runaways. The Bullom Shore villages of Madina and Yongro are listed 55 and 34 times respectively as a former place of enslavement. The town of Barlor, in the norther area of the Shore, was similarly referenced 33 times. Other areas within the colonial hinterlands of Sierra Leone were also major sources of runaways. A total of 46 individual subjects arrived from the town of Binty, in French-controlled Guinea, and 26 individuals had fled the interior town of Kambia on the Great Scarcies River. While most runaways were previously enslaved in coastal and interior areas north or northeast of Freetown, the Registers also contain clusters of escaped slaves from Sherbro and other societies located south and east of the Freetown Peninsula, including Cockboro, Bumpe, Samu, and Mongoro, among many others. Yet, the most commonly cited place of enslavement in the Registers was without a doubt the inland town of Port Lokkoh. In total, 158 former captives escaped to Freetown and were freed by the Sierra Leone colonial government. Port Lokkoh was a significant entrepôt in the supply of captives and commercial goods to the coast and further inland during the nineteenth century. As such, Port Lokkoh was well-connected with Freetown,

and runaway slaves likely relied on their knowledge and experiences on these same trading routes to help them navigate and survive their flights to the colony. The Registers of Escaped Slaves, particularly the “Where From” field, shows that Port Loko may have been one of the most prominent slave societies in a region where slavery was relatively common and widespread.

The next column of the Registers, “Former Master,” specifically catalogues the identities of the previous owners of escaped slaves arriving in the colony between 1875 and 1894. The names of 601 slaveholders were entered as the former masters of the 1152 freed slaves in the logbooks. This field offers some limited information on the potential demographic composition of this slave master class, while also presenting a deep look into the patterns and strategies of slaveholding in the region. In terms of gender, there was no formal category in the Register to state whether a slave master was a man or woman. Instead, if a slave owner was a woman, scribes typically made an extra note of it in this “Former Master” column, or in the Remarks field at the end of the subject’s entry. Less than 10 of 601 named slaveholders in the logbooks were explicitly listed as a woman or mistress. Therefore, it appears that while women indeed owned captives in Sierra Leone, the slave owning class may have been overwhelming male. These conclusions are purely speculative since there was no formal category noting the gender of a subject’s previous owner.

Likewise, the Registers did not feature an official column for the ethnicity of the former master but there were 142 entries with notes or references to the ethnic group of the subject’s owner. Within this subsample of the total entries in the Registers, colonial scribes identified masters from about 16 unique ethnic groups. Gallinas, Koso, Kru, Aku, Mendi, and Sherbro owners, for example, are cited in a few entries each. Susu, Fula, Mandingo, and Bullom, on the other hand, appeared to be the most prominent of the former masters. Susu and Fula, in

particular, show up as the former masters of 56 and 25 runaway slaves respectively. These findings, which are based on irregular data found in the “Former Master” field, deliver a small glimpse into the potential demographic makeup of slaveholders in the regions of Sierra Leone, emphasizing at a minimum the presence of women slaveholders and a possible predominance of Fula and Susu masters. These elements, especially the impact of Fula and Susu masters on the lives of captives, will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four.

Above all, this column is best utilized in uncovering and reconstructing the patterns and extent of slaveholding. Just as reoccurring locations in the “Where From” column marked locations with possibly high populations of slaves, reoccurring names in the “Former Master” field reveal the potential size of slaveholding ventures in the colony and its nearby hinterlands. Of the 601 owners named in the Registers, many only appear once or twice as the former masters of runaways. This implies that many slaveholders may have owned only a few slaves. But there were also dozens of masters who appear across numerous entries in the Registers. In the 1885 to 1894 ledger alone, for example, there were 14 individual masters who owned at least five slaves each. And furthermore, the Registers feature several examples of much more extensive patterns of slaveholding. A master named Ansie from Binty in French Guinea is listed as the former master of 19 different runaways<sup>15</sup> and similarly, Yahyahfora Carree was identified as the owner of 18 separate subjects.<sup>16</sup> Almanny Almareh from the town of Barlor owned at least 22 captives.<sup>17</sup> And Kanday Kondoo of Mongoroo and Sorie Conick of Bacolo were each identified

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<sup>15</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1885-1894, p. 97-99. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with the following abbreviation: RES, 1885-1894.

<sup>16</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1875-1884, p. 213-214. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with the following abbreviation: RES, 1875-1884.

<sup>17</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 57-59.

as the previous owners of 12 runaways respectively.<sup>18</sup> The two most significant slave owners found in the Registers of Escaped Slaves are Santiggy Nonkoh Lahai, who held 29 captives, and the son of the late Ali Bundoo, who owned upwards of 60 men, women, and children.<sup>19</sup> Both masters held their slaves at Port Lokkoh, which was also home to over 35 other slaveholders.

When cross-referenced with the “Where From” column, these data on slave ownership not only confirms Port Lokkoh as the most common origin point for runaway slaves, but show that it was also the base of operations for a high number of slave masters, including two of the most prominent owners in the Registers. Therefore, the field “Former Master” reveals both the presence and prevalence of both small and large-scale slaveholding patterns in the region. It also further illustrates the ubiquity of slave ownership within the many economic, social, and geographic spaces of Sierra Leone, while also emphasizing how slaveholding was intensified and deeply rooted in certain local societies.

The next column of the Register is divided between two headings, “with whom or where located.” These two phrases refer to the resettlement plans of registered runaways. This type of information can be utilized to uncover what happened to former captives after their arrival in Freetown. They also aid in locating and tracking the dispersal of the runaways in the city as they tried to re-establish their lives as free people. The “with whom” aspect of this column refers to the city resident or colonial subject who was charged with housing the former captive. A total of 267 runaways were specifically assigned to the home of a Freetownian. In general, but especially in the case of children, these residents appear to be responsible for the overall care, upkeep, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 19-20, 113-114.

<sup>19</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 26, 223-226.

most importantly, the safety of former captives. In several entries, colonial officials stressed that certain runaways were susceptible to re-enslavement in the city and elsewhere, and as a preventive measure, they were put under the care of these local residents. There were no details on how, if at all, these residents were compensated for sheltering former slaves in their households. Nor is it evident how long the former slaves were obligated to stay with this person or family.

The selection process for placing runaways with Freetownians was similarly unclear. If anything, the process seemed to have been ad hoc in nature and rooted in pragmatism and improvisation, as many British colonial policies in Africa were. For the most part, single subjects and families of runaways from the Register were often placed in the households of ordinary residents and families in Freetown. These Freetownians typically only appeared once in the “with whom” field of the Register, indicating that multiple runaways were not continuously placed under the care of a single resident or household. This pattern, along with the fact that only about 23% of runaways were officially placed with a local resident, also demonstrates that there may not have been significant benefits, nor a standardized practice, in helping to resettle former captives.

The personal requests and experiences of individual runaways also played a role in who they ended up staying with. For instance, officers in the Sierra Leone colonial police force occasionally aided runaways after they had deserted their masters in the city and elsewhere. Since these officers had helped to liberate them, some runaways, both adults and children, personally asked to stay under their care. The Government Arabic Writer and other officials who worked for the Government Interpreter received analogous requests after helping to register runaways after their arrival in Freetown. Other subjects conveyed their intention to stay with one

of their relatives who lived in the city, whose name was then recorded by colonial scribes. The final major category of Freetownians who took in these new arrivals were tradespeople. Fishermen, harbour pilots, and a cooper were all listed as local residents who volunteered or were assigned to watch over the former captives. Overall, the “with whom” field of the Registers of Escaped Slaves presents illuminating evidence on the people and families who took in runaway slaves as they acclimatized themselves to urban colonial life in Freetown. The names, positions, and professions of these individuals appear in over 250 entries and are key elements in reconstructing the life trajectories of escaped slaves after they regained their freedom.

Just as the Sierra Leone government recorded who recent arrivals were to stay with, it also documented the location of where exactly subjects intended to live in Freetown. This information was listed as the second half of the “with whom” column from above, but under the heading, “where located.” As could be expected from the constant influx of new arrivals in Freetown, the government saw it fit to try to keep track of the physical whereabouts and welfare of former captives as they became permanent residents of the city and colony. This field of information therefore provides a comprehensive listing of the specific places or general areas of relocation for hundreds of self-liberated slaves. It is essentially a listing of where individuals, groups, and families of former slaves ended up after they deserted their owners and were freed by the colonial government. When cross-referenced with the column “Where from” or places of enslavement, these data on relocation emphasize both where slaves had been held captive and where they resettled as free people. As such, it is a vital category information in reconstructing the voluntary and involuntary migration of former slaves, and in highlighting the rural, urban, and colonial spaces they likely traversed in both freedom and in bondage. Moreover, this particular field of the Registers can be used to recover and map the specific locations and

patterns of resettlement for individual and clusters of former captives in the city of Freetown and the Freetown Peninsula in general.

Colonial scribes inputted the place of relocation for runaway slaves in the vast majority of the cases in the Registers. Of the 1152 total entries in the logbooks, there are only 131 subjects without a designated location of resettlement. For the remaining 1021 runaways, the government described where they intended to relocate, albeit with varying degrees of specificity. These descriptions of relocation points ranged widely, from just stating “Freetown” to the districts, neighborhoods, streets, and even intersections where runaways chose or were assigned to live. In total, there are over 100 unique places of relocation listed in this field, indicating that formerly enslaved women, men, and children were likely well dispersed geographically within the urban space of Freetown.

The broadest and most common place of relocation was without a doubt “Freetown”. In 638 runaway slave reports, the city of Freetown is listed as the subject’s relocation point after their liberation. This designation is assigned to over half the total entries in the Registers. By entering “Freetown” as a general resettlement point for a runaway, the colonial government indicated that the subject intended to relocate somewhere in the city. Colonial officials may have relied on the general label of “Freetown” as a formulaic answer to the relocation field of the Registers. Scribes may have simply designated the city as a resettlement location to save time, especially when registering large concessions of fugitive slaves. On the other hand, many of the new arrivals might not have been overly familiar with the areas of the city and therefore did not declare any specific resettlement plans, other than their desire remain in Freetown. Nonetheless, for these 638 cases, we are left with no information on the streets, neighbourhoods, or even broader districts of the city that they relocated to.

Fortunately, there are dozens of additional entries in the Registers that provide more specific details on the resettlement locations of these former bondspeople. After “Freetown”, the second broadest designation were particular districts of the city. In these instances, the government recorded only the general region or part of Freetown that the subject chose to resettle in, leaving out precise neighborhoods and street addresses. The Mountain District and First Eastern District of Freetown appear in this relocation column. However, the most frequently listed district was by far the Second Eastern District, which was referenced as the general resettlement point for approximately 120 entries in both Registers. This resettlement trend could be attributed to the fact that runaway slaves were most often registered at the Second Eastern District Police Station. It is not surprising that many chose to live in the general vicinity of the police station, both for their safety and from their own knowledge of the area.

While the use of general districts was prevalent in this relocation field, scribes also recorded more precise descriptions of resettlement patterns. First, many subjects had evidently expressed their intention to live in specific neighborhoods and areas of the city. In over twenty individual cases, Congo Town, Kru Town, Gibraltar Wharf, Kossoh Town, King Jimmy, Lokkoh Town, Wilberforce, Wellington, and Foulah Town appear as the general areas of resettlement for new arrivals. Kissy Village, a neighborhood located in the east end of Freetown, was additionally listed as a place of relocation by another nine runaways. Yet, the most popular neighborhood for these ex-slaves was by far Freetown’s Cline’s Town, where the original Granville Town settlement had been founded in 1787. After uprooting their lives via slave flight, at least thirty-four individual runaways decided to resettle in this historic neighbourhood. Several towns and villages around the Freetown Peninsula were also commonly cited as places of relocation. These colonial towns and villages included Gloucester, Hastings, Regent, Charlotte, York, and Russell,

among others. Typically, these locations received no more than a handful of runaways over the twenty-year period of the Registers. The exception, however, was the town of Waterloo, which was situated about thirty kilometers southeast of Freetown. It appeared about as frequently as the Cline's Town neighbourhood, with thirty-five runaways declaring their intention to reside there after they were freed.

In addition to these districts, neighborhoods, and towns within or near Freetown, the Registers also featured even narrower information on the relocation of former slaves in the colony. In dozens of entries, scribes entered the precise street and in rare cases, the exact intersection of a runaways' new residence. There are well over 50 different street names in the Registers' field for relocation. These street names bring attention to the dispersal of runaway slaves within the city's urban landscape. Easton Street, Fort Street, Benjamin Lane, Edward Street, Hope Street, Magazine Court, Pademba Road, Priscilla Street, Goderich Road, Water Street, and Percival Street are just some of the roadways where former slaves chose to resettle. There were noticeably larger clusters of runaways at other street addresses. For instance, Bombay Street, Magazine Street, and Kissy Road, all located in the Magazine area of Freetown, each received five to seven runaways. However, the most popular resettlement point was by far Fourah Bay Road, which runs through several city blocks of Freetown. At least twenty-three former captives relocated to this street after their arrival in the city. Street intersections were also recorded in just a few cases in the Registers, offering the most accurate data on where former captives ended up after they were freed. One runaway, for example, was said to have resettled at the junction of Garrison and Fisher Streets. Another subject's relocation point in Freetown was similarly listed as Fourah Bay Road and Savage Square.

This relocation field in the Registers of Escaped Slaves is important for two major reasons. First, since the Registers were products of the colonial governments' efforts to liberate runaway slaves, the "Where located" and "With Whom" column illustrates precisely where many subjects were supposed to be resettled. In particular, it emphasizes their dispersal among the neighbourhoods, roads, and indeed, even intersections of Freetown. The second major implication of these data highlight the historical utility of the Registers as reservoirs of biographical information on Sierra Leone's enslaved population. By listing their resettlement location, the Registers can be utilized to retrace the journeys of hundreds of runaway slaves from their places of enslavement in the hinterlands of the colony to the precise locations of Freetown, where they resettled as freed people. Identifying the exact movements of runaway slaves into Freetown, as well as their spatial presence and integration into colonial society, are key elements in reconstructing the life histories of ex-slaves in this context.

The final and most heavily detailed column of the Registers is entitled "Remarks." In this space, scribes transcribed or summarized the subjects' motivations for abandoning their owners in the colony or its nearby hinterlands. One on hand, most of this field is littered with vague and formulaic language to explain why subjects escaped slavery. Understaffed, overworked, and likely pressed for time, especially during the registration of large clusters of runaways, scribes often resorted to short phrases, such as "escaped on account of ill treatment" or "escaped for freedom", as the only sort of explanation for why runaways fled their owners. Yet, on the other hand, there are hundreds of other registrations that contain drawn-out, well-detailed, and incredibly unique motivations in this Remarks field. In these cases, scribes summarized and transcribed long narratives outlining the circumstances of a runaway's flight. Through the former captive's articulation of what had happened to them and its transcription into the pages of the

Registers, we are left with a bounty of rare and diverse first-hand accounts on the lived experiences that shaped the life histories of the enslaved — including details on their original enslavement, labour, mistreatment, kinship groups, and their paths to freedom. When cross-referenced with the rest of the columns in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, we can therefore use this “Remarks” field to systemically piece together the identities of individual former slaves on relatively large scale, as well as ascertain the experiences, bonds, and horrific abuses that shaped their lives as captive human beings.

*Mistreatment in the Registers of Escaped Slaves: Problems and Methodological Approaches*

Analyzing the “Remarks” field in the Registers is a central purpose in each of this dissertation’s following chapters. As such, it is necessary to fully address the nuances, limitations, and methodological challenges of what is undoubtedly the most qualitatively rich category of data in the logbooks. As mentioned above, the Remarks field occasionally disclosed the daily labour of enslaved women, men, and children, as well as other important information. Yet, it was most often used as a space to document the most significant burdens of enslaved life: mistreatment and the volatility of slave-master relationships. In particular, this column can be utilized to uncover and better understand the precise definitions, prevalence and severity of slave abuse in late nineteenth colonial Sierra Leone.

In the Remarks field of each subject, colonial officials transcribed or summarized the runaway’s reasons for deserting their former master. In terms of length and precise details, these narratives varied significantly. In most cases, colonial scribes relied on one or two short sentences to describe the factors that led to a former slave’s escape, often leaving very little

evidence on the conditions the subject lived through. Other Remarks entries, however, are considerably longer and more heavily detailed. There are even a few Remarks fields that contain narratives that extend beyond the space of column, requiring an attached note to give further details on the circumstances of the runaway's enslavement and flight.

One of the longest, most detailed reports in the Remarks field is found in the entry for an escaped slave named Mophey, who arrived in Freetown on May 31, 1876.<sup>20</sup> With the limited space of the Remarks column itself, the Government Interpreter, Thomas George Lawson, explained Mophey's story in an attached note. The following is an excerpt from Lawson's note:

The man Mophey, an escaped slave now brought to be presented before the Police Magistrate. From his statement appeared to be sold as a slave to his master at Rotifunk in the Bompeh Country Sherbro at which place he made his escape and took passage in a canoe with a Sierra Leone woman named Bitsy Shilling, native of Aberdeen of Oliver Street, who brought [her] to that village a few days ago, and when the man found that he was free here, refused to return with her to Rotofunk where he [apprehend] he would be [re-enslaved]. The woman Bitsy Shilling employed one William Cole of the same village to apprehend him and have him tied and forcibly placed in a canoe at Aberdeen Wharf against his will, and that while he was in the canoe, the cords with which his hands were tied was loosened by one of the persons on board the canoe, he then took the opportunity of jumping into the sea and swimming ashore... Fortunately for him, one Christopher Steward being on the beach and saved and took him to his house[.] This took place yesterday evening at 7pm.

The man Christopher Steward was eye witness to the above transaction, the man was tied by William Cole by the direction of Betsy Shilling who was herself present[.] She even herself struck the man with a walking stick of hardwood about an inch and a half thick severely on the top of his right shoulder[.] The trace of which can still be seen on his person and was immediately led to the canoe at Aberdeen wharf by the brother-in-law of the woman Betsy Shilling named James Shilling and placed in canoe which immediately left for Sherbro with all on board[.] But little before reaching the Light House when his hands were untied as stated above, he leaped into the sea as stated above[.] He was brought to the Government Interpreter's House this morning in order that the case should be brought to the notice of the Police Magistrate. The matter was reported to the Police Stationed at that place (one George) by Steward last evening and he simply directing Steward to bring the man to the Government Interpreter and said he has nothing to do with it[.] This as said in the presence of Bitsy Shilling, who also went to the Police

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<sup>20</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 12.

Station with Steward and the man.<sup>21</sup>

Two days later, on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Police Magistrate, W. Doorly, added an updated note in the margin disputing some of the testimony of the witness Christopher Steward, who he described as a former convict and “a vile character.”<sup>22</sup> Doorly also added that the government seemed to lose track of Mophey’s whereabouts, stating that the former slave had “truly run away.”<sup>23</sup> It is unknown what happened to Mophey after this ordeal. Still, the Remarks section of his entry offers details about his enslavement and escape, as well as the very particular forms of mistreatment he endured. We are told in explicit language a description of how Mophey was physically assaulted with a one and half inch stick, the resulting wound from this attack, and the way he was bound on a canoe at a local wharf. Mophey’s multi-paragraphed explanation of his enslavement and escape was not a typical occurrence in the Remarks section of the Registers. Most entries in the Registers are significantly shorter and less detailed, frequently using a single sentence with ambiguous or formulaic language to explain the circumstances that pushed the enslaved to flee. In 487 of the 1152 total entries in the Registers, the phrase “made his escape on account of ill treatment,” or some variant of it, such as “escaped for ill treatment,” or “escaped their masters due to ill treatment,” appears as the only explanation of the circumstances leading to the subject’s escape. This accounts for approximately 42% of all cases across both logbooks. The appearance of these generalizations throughout the Registers creates a serious obstacle in uncovering the on the ground realities of enslavement. Phrases like “escaped on account of ill treatment” and its many variants, especially cast a cloud of ambiguity over slave-master

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

relationships and the forms and extent of mistreatment among the enslaved population in Sierra Leone.

This problem is better understood through the following two case studies of individual runaway slaves. The first example involves a twenty-three-year-old Korankoh man named Keeneebah, who was registered as an escaped slave on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1891.<sup>24</sup> He was previously owned by a man named Baba in the town of Kambia northern parts of the Bullom Shore. At some point before his registration, Keeneebah found his way to Freetown and afterwards, he resettled on nearby Tasso Island in the Sierra Leone estuary. For his Remarks field, colonial scribes only recorded this phrase: “Escaped on account of ill treatment.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, albeit over ten years earlier, a twenty-five-old Mendi man named Jaimey, alias Yarhey, was registered as an escaped slave on October 4, 1880.<sup>26</sup> He fled his master, Doombuyah, who resided at an unspecified location on the Bullom Shore. Jaimey’s entry lists Freetown as his place of resettlement, with his Remarks column only stating, “Made his escape to the settlement for freedom from ill treatment.”<sup>27</sup> These two examples illustrate some of the limitations of the Registers as tools of historical reconstruction: “escaped on account of ill treatment” does not reveal the intricacies of slave-master relationships, especially in relation to the exact forms of mistreatment suffered by slaves.

The problem of vagueness in the Remarks field is also compounded by additional generalizations, formulaic terminology, as well as scores of missing information. Most notably,

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<sup>24</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 111.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

scribes only used variants of the phrases “escaped to attain freedom” or “escaped because he was a slave” 140 times to describe a runaway’s motivation for fleeing slavery. This language as the sole explanation for slave flight occurs in about 12% of the total cases in the two Registers of Escaped Slaves. These types of phrases across dozens of entries demonstrate that slaves yearned for freedom and chose to weather the dangers of flight than endure a lifetime of bondage. Despite the absence of expository dialogue, these slaves’ conscious choice to run away to attain freedom was a strident indictment of slavery and their slave owners who continued to operate in the colony and its hinterlands. Their actions were symptomatic of systems of slavery that were underpinned by violence, coercion, and the exploitation of labour. They freely chose to endure the vulnerability and displacement of flight and resettlement rather than remain under the control of their former masters. But still, phrases, such as “escaped for freedom” and its many variants, disclose very little about the minutia of enslaved life, especially the precise forms of mistreatment and punishment doled out by slave masters.

One of the earliest entries in the 1885-1894 Register is plagued by this specific kind of limited descriptive language. On March 11, 1885, Camray Tebin, a nineteen-year-old Mendi man, registered as a runaway slave in Freetown.<sup>28</sup> He was recorded as being enslaved in Port Lokkoh by a Fula man named Murry Lalloofoo, and that he intended to remain in an unspecified part of Freetown. His Remarks field only states: “Made his escape to attain freedom.”<sup>29</sup> Although it can be surmised that Camray Tebin’s relationship with Murry Lalloofoo was likely

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<sup>28</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

unfavourable since he ran away, his entry provides no explicit details on the daily conditions of his enslavement or treatment.

Beyond cases featuring generalized language and formulaic phrases, such as “escaped for freedom” or “escaped on account of ill treatment,” there are over a dozen entries with completely blank Remarks fields. These sorts of cases are considerably less extensive than the appearance of standardized phrases, with 15 cases offering no attainable explanation for the subject’s flight. In most of these instances, the missing information is due to a lost page in the Register, document decay, or because colonial scribes simply did not record the runaway’s testimony. In summary, the Remarks column of the Registers of Escaped Slaves is plagued by generalizations, formulaic language, and missing information. In total, 642 entries, or approximately 56% of entire logbooks, offer very little details about the day-to-day realities of slavery, especially in relation to the treatment, work, and general hardships of individual slaves.

Despite the preponderance of these descriptively limited entries, the Remarks column of the Registers remains a valuable dataset to uncover the precise and diverse methods used to discipline the enslaved population. The problem of ambiguous language in the Remarks column can be remedied by identifying and analyzing the hundreds of qualitatively rich cases in the Registers. These sorts of cases, which essentially make-up the remaining 510 entries of the Registers, contain much more explicit and occasionally drawn-out explanations for slaves’ escape. These cases vary in length, some only a sentence or two and others extending onto attached notes, like the case of Mophey mentioned above. Many of these qualitatively rich entries evidence the specific forms of mistreatment endured by slaves, as well as other details about their experiences under slavery. By analyzing this sub-sample of descriptive and often lengthy Remarks entries, we can, for example, precisely identify and measure the prevalence of

actions that were considered ill treatment in the minds of the enslaved. In exploring these categories of mistreatment, including the threat of re-sale, starvation, broken promises, and physical abuse, the subsequent chapters of this dissertation will create a grim picture of enslaved life, not shaped by the benevolence of masters, but founded upon strict control, exploitation, hard punishments, and real brutality.

### *Conclusion*

Using the two Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894, this chapter outlined how British colonial governments at Freetown formally processed, freed, and resettled fugitive slaves from within the colony and its surrounding regions. Despite the efforts of some colonial officials to criminalize undocumented runaways, no official ordinance was implemented that required the new arrivals to report themselves to the colonial government. Therefore, most runaway slaves who made it to Freetown were never registered, and we are left with no evidence on who they were or what they lived through. While the Registers of Escaped Slaves are not a complete account of the total number of slaves who fled to Freetown, they are still a continuous twenty-year record of the liberation of 1152 runaway men, women and children.

During their intake with the colonial government, these over 1100 individuals spoke with colonial officials and their personal information was entered across the numerous fields of the Registers. Scribes often recorded a wide array of biographical data on each subject, including the names of the runaways, their dates of arrival, ages, gender, ethnicities, places of enslavement, and the names and ethnicities of their former masters. This chapter produced three major findings about the historical utility of these categories of information. First, it demonstrated how

they can be used to accurately piece together the identities and movement of individual runaway slaves. For example, using the Registers, we can pinpoint exactly where a particular fugitive slave was held in captivity in the wider region, as well as ascertain the exact date when they officially regained their freedom in Freetown. Second, the chapter outlined the various kinds of information that can be gleaned from the Registers' many fields. My analysis of these data revealed aspects of the demographic organization of the broader enslaved population, in addition to other features of slavery in this historical context, such as the scale and spatial dispersal of slave ownership. By tabulating categories pertaining to gender and age, for example, I was able to show that women and children were commonly enslaved during the late nineteenth century. Thirdly, through the Registers' information on the relocation of the runaways, this chapter highlighted the resettlement patterns of ex-slaves and offered a glimpse into their post-emancipation integration into colonial Freetown.

The last section of the chapter delved deeper into the utility of the Registers as tools to uncover the realities of enslaved life. I assessed the limitations and potential of the Registers' Remarks field as a window into the specific types of slave abuse carried out by masters. This final column of the Register, which was typically used by the government to record subjects' reasons for absconding, was often only composed of short, vague, and formulaic phrases. In other words, the entirety of a runaway's experience in bondage was often collapsed into less than one or two sentences. Yet, as this chapter emphasized, these problems of brevity and ambiguity in the Remarks field can be remedied. While most entries contain formulaic explanations, such as "escaped on account of ill treatment," there are still hundreds of other cases that offer longer, more explicit accounts of the runaways' lives under slavery. By isolating and analyzing these drawn-out, heavily detailed cases, the Registers can be used to identify principal forms of slave

mistreatment, from threats of re-sale and food deprivation to broken promises and physical violence. Moreover, the more explicit entries in the Registers often contained references to the general labour conditions of slavery and deployment of slaves. As will be shown in the next chapter, we can draw on these explicit cases to not only better understand categories of mistreatment, but to also gain insight into the work and acquisitive value of the enslaved in late nineteenth century Sierra Leone.

## CHAPTER 3

### ENSLAVED LABOUR IN AN ANTISLAVERY COLONY: SLAVES IN THE URBAN AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES OF SIERRA LEONE

#### *Introduction*

Enslaved people supplied labour and produced wealth for their enslavers. In Africa, some of the tasks forced upon the enslaved involved tending to livestock, cultivating fields, producing commodities, carrying goods, and engaging in commercial trade, among other types of work. The acquisitive value of slaves is a near-universal thread in most systems of slavery. Slaveholders typically possessed slaves to further their own economic interests. While slavery served many functions in African history, the control, coercion, and exploitation of the labour of slaves were often principle factors of enslaved life. Examining the daily tasks, labour, and deployment of slaves is, therefore, paramount in understanding the quotidian realities of captivity and the broader impact of the institution of slavery in slave societies. This is the central focus of this chapter, which uses the Registers of Escaped Slaves to uncover and analyze the various types of labour conducted by slaves in late nineteenth-century Sierra Leone. By concentrating on the work performed by enslaved people, it emphasizes the exploitative nature of slavery and illuminates the ironic interplay between slave labour and the economy of a colony that was originally founded for freed slaves.

This chapter contributes to broader scholarly discussions on the nature of enslavement and the institution of slavery in Africa. Some historians, anthropologists, and other social scientists have characterized slavery as largely benevolent, describing it as an institution of social

marginalization, akin to other relationships of dependence in African societies.<sup>1</sup> The incorporation of outsiders into larger corporate groups or households was certainly an important function of slavery in many societies, and the conditions of enslaved life varied in different locations and time periods.<sup>2</sup> However, defining slavery in principally benign terms can also minimize the coercive, exploitative, and economic tenets of slave systems, especially in locations

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<sup>1</sup> This perspective is tied to Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff's thesis on African slavery as an institution of marginalization. They argued that slavery was grounded in kinship ties that was used as a social mechanism to incorporate individuals, especially outsiders, into families, households, and other larger corporate groups. According to Miers and Kopytoff, slavery was just one of many relationships of dependency in African societies. Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, eds., *Slavery and in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 4-5. In response, many Africanists argued that the Mier-Kopytoff model did not adequately address the economic underpinnings of slavery in African history. For a sample of the early critiques of Miers and Kopytoff's argument about African slavery, see: Martin Klein, "The Study of Slavery in Africa: A Review Article" *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 19, 4 (1978), pp. 599-609, Frederick Cooper, "The Problem of Slavery in African Studies," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 20, 1 (1979), pp. 103-125, Paul E. Lovejoy, Igor Kopytoff, and Frederick Cooper, "African Slavery [with Commentary]," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, Vol. 6, 1, *Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies* (Summer 1979), pp. 19-83.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in assessing the relationships between slaves and masters in Africa, Jonathan Glassman stated the following: "those in Africa arose out of pre-existing systems of personal dependency, in which masters and slaves spoke the language of clientelism at the outset. When emergent African planter classes attempted to reduce their gang-slaves' opportunities for local social reproduction, slaves typically resisted by manipulating older ideologies of client slavery in an effort to maintain or enhance their ability to construct institutions of kinship and community within the broader contours of construct institutions of kinship and community." Jonathan Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," *The Journal of African History*, 32, (1991), p. 279. Patricia Romero made a similar argument about slave-master relationships in her study of the port city of Lamu. Patricia Romero, *Lamu: History, Society, and Family in an East African Port City* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1997), p. 129. In studying French West Africa, Sean Hanretta also explored the networks of dependency between slaves and masters, as well as slavery's importance to lineage politics. Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.210-224. These are just a few examples of many. In his survey of the history of slavery in Africa, Paul E. Lovejoy acknowledged these different functions and manifestations of slavery in African societies but stressed the practice's inherently exploitative and violent nature. Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Cambridge University Press: New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 1-3.

such as British Sierra Leone. By studying the work of the enslaved, this chapter argues that slavery in colonial Sierra Leone was, in fact, a labour-intensive and profit-driven practice and that enslaved human beings were key strands in the colony's urban markets, commercial networks, and agricultural production. It focuses on the unstudied life histories of former bondspeople, specifically foregrounding their individual labour, identities, and experiences to illustrate the profound connections between slavery and the urban and regional economies of Sierra Leone and its nearby hinterlands. This chapter recognizes the importance of kinship and the institution of slavery, but it ultimately argues that slaveholding was also deeply tied to economic production and that the enslaved held significant acquisitive value. As Paul E. Lovejoy and Martin Klein stated in their critique of Miers and Kopytoff, "Slaves were a commodity that had to be produced, but they were also producers in agriculture, crafts, mineral processing, and domestic activities. The double nature of slaves as an item of production and as an instrument of production demonstrates the fundamental importance of slavery to West African economy and society."<sup>3</sup>

Similar debates have roiled the study of slavery in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Sierra Leone. Historian John Grace examined British rhetoric and colonial policy measures concerning slavery in both the colony of Sierra Leone and in the Sierra Leone Protectorate after 1896. Echoing Miers and Kopytoff's thesis on slavery, Grace framed enslaved life in Sierra Leone, and indeed elsewhere in West Africa, as relatively innocuous in nature. For example, he argued that slaves in West Africa had lived comparatively safe, secure, comfortable,

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Klein and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Slavery in West Africa," in H. Gemery and J.S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1979), p. 183.

and even happy lives in comparison to those in other locations.<sup>4</sup> Grace extended this argument further by outlining some of the apparent benefits of enslaved status, such as slave masters' commitment to care for their slaves and the notion that slaves were not legally responsible for their own actions.<sup>5</sup> Regarding slavery and enslaved labour in Sierra Leone, he wrote the following passage,

Masters were more often than not kind and considerate, and enlightened self-interest, if nothing else, would persuade them to treat their slaves reasonably well because if they did not do so the slaves would work badly or run away. Also, it was obvious that slaves worked better if they had adequate food and shelter...The master was expected to give his slave a wife and land; typically the slave would be given two free days a week to work his land for the benefit of himself and his woman and children.<sup>6</sup>

In this view, slavery was less of a system of subjugation and instead, more akin to a harmonious and reciprocal relationship between the enslaved and their masters. In his work on slavery and emancipation in Sierra Leone between 1894 and 1928, historian Ismail Rashid countered Grace's assessment of enslaved life in two major ways. First, he emphasized the importance and arduous nature of slave labour in the region, especially in portage and on plantations in food-producing areas like Moriah and the Futa Jallon.<sup>7</sup> Second, Rashid acknowledged that some slaves were granted certain rights and obligations from their owners, but he stressed that these concessions

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<sup>4</sup> John Grace, *Domestic Slavery in West Africa with a Particular Reference to the Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1896-1927* (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Grace, *Domestic Slavery*, p. 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Ismail Rashid, 'Do Dady nor Lef me Make dem Carry me: Slave Resistance and Emancipation in Sierra Leone, 1894-1928,' in Suzanne Miers and Martin Klein, eds., *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), p. 211-212. T.J. Alldridge, who served as Travelling Commissioner in Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century, also observed the widespread use of slave labour on the farms of slaveholders throughout the colonial hinterlands. T.J. Alldridge, *A Transformed Colony. Sierra Leone: As It Was, As It Is, Its Progress, Peoples, Native Customs, and Undeveloped Wealth* (London: Seeley and Co., 1910), p. 280.

were often earned by a captive's prolonged hard work and loyalty.<sup>8</sup> This chapter buttresses Rashid's emphasis on the centrality of enslaved labour in Sierra Leone, while also adding new perspectives on the experiences, conditions, and variations of the work conducted by slaves during the two decades before 1894.

In order to reveal daily realities of the enslaved labour in the Registers, I concentrate on a subset of runaway slave arrivals where subjects referenced, alluded to, or described the labour they provided to their owners. These descriptions of assigned tasks, or general labour conditions appear in the Remarks column in select entries, albeit in varying degrees of specificity. In some instances, cases have passages with the phrases, "escaped because of the rigorous servitude of slavery" or "escaped because of the hard work." Other examples from this subset of cases deliver even more nuanced perspectives, often indicating the exact type of work that was forced upon the runaways by their masters. These references to the assigned tasks of slaves typically appeared as the runaways contextualized the circumstances of their escape. For instance, numerous former slaves explained that their masters had voluntarily brought them to Freetown to conduct business before they fled to colonial authorities. Phrases, such as "came to Freetown for trading purposes," "came to the settlement with oxen for sale", or "brought by his master to Freetown to sell gold", appear throughout this subset.

Of the 1152 runaway slave reports across both Registers of Escaped Slaves, there are a total of 114 cases that contain explicit references to either the general severity of enslaved labour or the specific work conducted by individual captives. This subset represents approximately 10% of all the runaway slave listings in the Registers from 1875 to 1894. These labour-related entries,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

although only a small fraction of the total cases, provide rare and valuable insight into the patterns and complexities of slave labour in colonial Sierra Leone, and thus constitute the principal source-base for this chapter. By investigating these unstudied cases from the Registers, this chapter offers entirely new details on the lives of the enslaved and the history of slave labour in Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century. In particular, it emphasizes the generally exploitative conditions of slaveholding, the place of slavery within the economic structures of the wider region, and the diversity of tasks and roles that were forced upon the enslaved population.

#### *The Sierra Leone Colony, Freetown, and the Sierra Leone-Guinea Commercial System*

Drawing on the subset of 114 work-related cases in the Registers, this chapter provides a bottom-up analysis on the identities and daily struggles of the slaves who toiled for their masters in the colony and its hinterlands. It therefore contributes to the existing historiography on the region's political economy and systems of commerce in the late nineteenth century. This subfield of research is made up of the seminal and extensive studies of historian Allen Howard,<sup>9</sup> as well

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<sup>9</sup> Howard's contributions to this subfield consists primarily of the following works: Allen Howard, "Cross-Boundary Traders in the Era of High Imperialism: Changing Structures and Strategies in the Sierra Leone-Guinea Region," *Journal of Urban Research*, 10 (2014); Allen Howard, "Contesting Commercial Space in Freetown, 1860-1930: Traders, Merchants, and Officials," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 37, 2 (2013), pp. 236-268; Allen Howard, "Mande Kola Traders of Northwestern Sierra Leone, late 1700's to 1930," *Mande Studies*, Vol. 9 (2007), pp. 83-102; Allen Howard, "Nineteenth Century Coastal Slave Trading and the British Abolition Campaign in Sierra Leone," *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 27, 1 (2006), pp. 23-49; Allen Howard, "Re-Marking on the Past: Spatial Structures and Dynamics in the Sierra Leone-Guinea Plain, 1860-1920s," in Allen Howard and Richard M. Shain, eds., *The Spatial Factor in African History: The Relationship of the Social, Material, and Perceptual* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2005), pp. 291-348; Allen Howard, "Trade and Islam in Sierra Leone 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries," in Alusine Jalloh and David Skinner, eds., *Islam and Trade in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1997), pp. 21-63; Allen Howard, "The Relevance of Spatial Analysis for African Economic History: the Sierra Leone-Guinea System," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 17, 3 (1976), pp. 365-388.

as the diverse and important works of other scholars.<sup>10</sup> In particular, Howard's designation and study of the Sierra Leone-Guinea commercial system represents the broader geographic and economic zone –consisting of the polities, institutions, trading networks, and relationships – that sustained the Sierra Leone colony, its surrounding hinterlands, and the wider region during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

Geographically, this Sierra Leone-Guinea system was located on the coastal plain of the modern Republics of Sierra Leone and Guinea. As Howard explained, its shared geographic features consisted of an “altitude below about 150 metres, average annual rainfall over 250 centimetres, and forest or mixed forest-savanna-farm bush vegetation.”<sup>12</sup> Palm products, peanuts, rice, and kola were the major agricultural crops for this region.<sup>13</sup> In terms of its rough physical

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to Howard's scholarship, there has been a wealth of research on the economic history of Sierra Leone during the latter nineteenth century. These studies covered a wide range of factors that shaped the economic history and development of Sierra Leone, from the rise of Muslim Fula entrepreneurs in colonial Freetown to the trading prowess of Krio women on the frontiers of the colony. A sample of these publications include, but are not limited to: Philip Misevich, *Abolition and the Transformation of Atlantic Commerce in Southern Sierra Leone, 1790s to 1860s* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2019); Philip Misevich, “Chapter 10. Freetown and “Freedom?” Colonialism and Slavery in Sierra Leone, 1790s to 1861,” in Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition, and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), pp. 189-216; Gibril Cole, *The Krio of West Africa: Islam, Culture, Creolization, and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013); Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Alusine Jalloh, *African Entrepreneurship: Muslim Fula Merchants in Sierra Leone* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1999); Alusine Jalloh and David E. Skinner, eds., *Islam and Trade in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1997); Winston McGowan, “The Establishment of Long-Distance Trade between Sierra Leone and its Hinterlands, 1787-1821,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 31, 1 (1990), pp. 25-41; C. Magbaily Fyle, *History and Socio-Economic Development in Sierra Leone: A Reader* (Freetown, Sierra Leone: SLADEA, 1988); E. Frances White, *Sierra Leone's Settler Women Traders: Women on the Afro-European Frontier* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1987); Adam Jones, *From Slaves to Palm Kernels: A History of the Galinhas Country (West Africa) 1730-1890* (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Howard, “Relevance of Spatial Analysis,” p. 367.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

boundaries in the late 1800's, the Sierra Leone-Guinea system stretched east and west nearly 500 kilometers from the Atlantic coast to as far inland as the towns of Kankan and Siguiri in eastern Guinea. From the north and south, it reached approximately 250 kilometers from the Futa Jallon to Mendi country in the Sierra Leone colonial hinterlands, encompassing the entirety of the Bullom Shore, the Freetown Peninsula, and their adjacent areas.<sup>14</sup>

The shared geographic zone gave way to common and reciprocal patterns of trade and commerce. As Howard outlined, the Sierra Leone-Guinea coastal plain produced, exported, and redistributed a range of produce, manufactured products, and other commodities, such as kola, palm oil, groundnuts, cattle, and rubber. Rice, miscellaneous foodstuff, and building materials were also brought into and sold in Freetown markets. Moreover, this movement of goods extended outwardly as well, circulating items from Freetown and other coastal areas into the hinterlands of the colony and deeper interiors of the general region.<sup>15</sup> During the late 1800's, this vast interregional trading system typically operated along three major routes: the Falaba Road and Futa Scarcies Corridor, both of which were oriented east and west, and the Coastal Corridor, which ran north and south along the Atlantic littoral and encompassed Freetown and the Sierra Leone Colony.<sup>16</sup> These trading corridors, which consisted of roads, waterways, and shoreline, connected Freetown with coastal and inland towns, such as Port Lokkoh and Kambia, among others. In turn, these sub-regional locations also facilitated the dispersal of commercial items deeper into the interiors to places as far as the Futa Jallon and elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 368-369.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 371-372.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 370-373.

Slaves were also trafficked along in the regions and along the routes of this commercial system. Howard focuses on this issue of slaving within the Sierra Leone-Guinea coastal plain in his more recent article on coastal slave trading and colonial-abolition practice in Sierra Leone. Specifically, he outlines patterns of slave trafficking, the pace of anti-slavery efforts of the colonial government, as well as the resiliency and persistence of slave traders in the region.<sup>18</sup> This case study by Howard effectively demonstrates the continued presence of slavery and slave trafficking in Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century. Yet, we still know very little about the identities and experiences of the individual captives who were not only trafficked in the region but were also forced to work within the commercial networks of the Sierra Leone-Guinea coastal plain. Therefore, this chapter uses the Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894 to build upon Howard's pioneering studies by identifying, reconstructing, and charting how the life trajectories of the enslaved collided with, shaped, and sustained this interregional economic system. More simply, it confirms Howard's patterns of commerce in Sierra Leone, while also introducing and focusing on the labour and identities — from their names, ages, gender, ethnicities, and places of origins — of the individual slaves who were made to toil along these trade circuits into and out of the colony and its hinterlands.

The lived experiences of the former slaves in the Registers therefore offer new insights on the conditions and nature of slavery as it was practiced in the environs of the colony. These partial life trajectories of the enslaved, which are composed of the runaways' choices, actions, and preserved testimonials, tell a principally harsh and exploitative story of slavery in Sierra Leone, especially as it pertains to enslaved labour. The dialectic between master and slave was

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<sup>18</sup> Howard, "Nineteenth-Century Coastal Slave Trading."

not always peaceful, nor was it mutually beneficial. Slaves were put to work by their masters, who sought to maximize the labour output of their bondpeople. And as we will see, slave masters implemented excessive and taxing work regimens upon their slaves, pushing them to their physical limits and leading many to flee to Freetown in retribution.

*Accounts of Labour Exploitation in the Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves, 1875-1894*

In the subset of 114 runaway slave entries that note specific tasks or labour conditions, 81 cases mention the generally rigorous labour demands imposed upon slaves by their masters. In most instances, these work demands were not only tangentially referenced by the runaways but often framed as the de facto reason for a subject's departure to Freetown. Although these cases do not shed light on the precise roles or tasks assigned to slaves, they are useful in discerning slaves' perceptions and attitudes towards their excessive work regimens. Since these cases were forged in the lived and until now, unstudied experiences of individual slaves, they are new and prime examples of the labour and overall drudgery of slavery during the colonial era in Sierra Leone and Africa broadly.

Even though they lack the specificity to delineate the exact tasks of slaves, these 81 runaway slave entries contain clear and sometimes vivid text to describe the general work conditions of enslaved labour systems in Sierra Leone. In the Remarks field of these specific cases, there are several common terms and phrases that were used by slaves and recorded by colonial scribes to capture the severity of enslaved work in the region. For example, the cases contain statements such as, "escaped on account of the hard servitude of slavery", "escaped to the colony on account of hard slavery", "escaped due to the hard labour of slavery", or simply,

“escaped because of hard work.” These descriptors are in stark contrast to the mild, harmonious, and benevolent characterizations of enslaved life in Sierra Leone that are found in some of the established historiography. Slaves themselves perceived their subordinate position as one that was shaped by their master’s exploitative, excessive, and exhausting work demands. Slavery was indeed “hard,” as many runaways conveyed to colonial authorities in Freetown. It was a component of enslavement that undoubtedly affected the lives of countless other enslaved people, while also serving as a trigger that ignited the self-liberation of many others.

The following sets of case studies from the 81 listings denoting hard labour are made-up of both groups of runaways and those who arrived at Freetown alone. First, these examples will explore and stress the human experiences of enslaved labour by identifying the actual individuals who were overworked, as well as exploring how they interpreted and survived their masters’ exploitive work regimens. Second, the case studies will assess the sheer extent of hard labour by assessing its effects on different segments of the enslaved population in various locations of Sierra Leone. Together, these personal stories of formerly enslaved people aim to underscore the exploitation and inherent struggle of slavery, as well as the centrality of labour in master-slave relationships.

#### *Examples of Hard Labour Practices in the 1875-1884 Register of Escaped Slaves*

In this section, I will investigate examples of hard labour from the first Register of Escaped Slaves, which covers runaway slave reports from 1875 to 1884. Our first case study focuses on the entries for four men who fled enslavement from the small coastal village of Madina on the Bullom Shore. On April 20, 1880, four Temne men were officially registered as

runaway slaves with the colonial government in Freetown.<sup>19</sup> While they had been enslaved in the same location, the four men each held by a different owner. The first individual listed was twenty-two-year-old Cho, who was previously the property of a woman named Hannah Croo. The next two entries were two males with the name Camray. “Camray 1<sup>st</sup>”, as he was listed in the Register, was also twenty-two years old and recorded as the ex-slave of an owner named Carifalah. “Camray 2<sup>nd</sup>”, on the other hand, was twenty years old, and his master was reported as Darma Dawoda. The last entry of the four Temne men was a nineteen-year-old named Saisai Lool, who had been previously owned by Yah Mynah.<sup>20</sup> Despite being owned by separate slaveholders, these four men planned and successfully executed an escape from Madina. After likely crossing the Sierra Leone River in a canoe, the four runaways landed on the shores of the city and reported themselves as escaped slaves. In the custody of colonial authorities, the four subjects recounted their reasons for running away, with all them declaring the hard labour of slavery as their prime motivation for absconding.<sup>21</sup> As they continued their dialogue and registration with the British in Freetown, the four men articulated their choice to remain in Freetown as freed people and “seek employment as labourers.”<sup>22</sup>

Our second case study appears about a year and a half after the arrival of the four men from Madina, with another group of runaways showing up in Freetown with similar complaints of excessive labour demands from their masters. On September 22, 1882, five runaways were

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<sup>19</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1875-1884, p. 95. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with following abbreviation: RES, 1875-1884.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 95-96.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 96

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

registered with the colonial government in Freetown and officially liberated from slavery.<sup>23</sup> They were all previously enslaved in towns and villages south of the Freetown Peninsula, roughly around the area of Samu. This cluster of runaway slaves was similarly composed entirely of men, but with significant variations in age and ethnicity. The first entry in the group, a forty-year-old Temne named Foday, had previously belonged to an enslaver called Sorie Konday. Next, Garhoe, also forty years old, was listed as a Lokkoh, and his master was identified as Foday Mandoe. The following two entries in this group were thirty-five-year-old Lamina Kimboe and twenty-year-old Morlie, both listed as Temne. The former's owner was known only as Sehra, and the latter was enslaved by a man named Momodoo Lammah. Baree Kehrumah appears as the master for the final two entries of this group of runaways. He previously held twenty-five-year-old Bocary Worlay, a Lokkoh, and twenty-two-year-old Bey Fonti, a Mendi-Temne, as captives at his place of residence.<sup>24</sup>

The mode or route of their journey to Freetown is not specified, nor alluded to in their entries. However, the five runaways could have traveled on foot north from their places of enslavement near Samu, first crossing the Bumpe and Ribi Rivers before continuing along the Freetown Peninsula. They also might have made their way directly to Freetown via canoe along the colony's southern coastline. Whatever the case, this band of enslaved people arrived together in the city by at least the date of their registration on September 22, 1882. The five runaways were interviewed by colonial officials, during which they revealed the circumstances leading to their escape. They all explicitly referenced their masters' rigorous labour demands as a primary

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 161-162.

reason for their escape from slavery.<sup>25</sup> The five temporarily decided to stay in the city, with Freetown being recorded as their place of relocation. However, the entire group expressed their desire to eventually travel back to their people and home villages. “Desire to remain here till the opportunity offers to return to their native home” is the final passage in their Remarks entry.<sup>26</sup>

These personal stories, when examined in tandem with the four Temne men from Madina, provide insight on the patterns and dispersal of hard labour practices throughout the Sierra Leone Colony. First, the cases above point to the existence of exploitative labour regimes in at least one additional geographic area of the colony. Since this cluster of fugitives originated from around Samu, they offer evidence of overworked bondspeople in the southern portions of the colony, along with the existent data on Madina on the Bullom Shore, north of Freetown. Second, the demographic make-up of the runways coming from Samu is also useful in indicating the pervasiveness of labour abuses across different demographic rungs of the enslaved population, especially concerning age and ethnic groups. Whereas, the four individuals from Madina were all listed as being of Temne-descent, the five captives arriving from the south of the colony consisted of multiple ethnic groups. Lokkoh, Temne, and Mende-Lokkoh appear in the ethnicity or “Nationality” field for these runaways, indicating, at the very least, that slaves of different ethnic origins were subjected to unreasonably excessive labour regimens. Or, more simply put, Temnes were not the only ethnic group to be overworked by their owners. Regarding age ranges, the four runaways from Madina in Bullom were again a relatively homogenous group, with individuals coming in between nineteen and twenty years old. The runaways from Samu likewise consisted of subjects in their twenties but also featured two significantly older

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

individuals who were thirty-five and forty years old, respectively. This age gap indicates that young and older slaves alike were susceptible to the harsh work orders of their owners. The notion that owners continued to impose unreasonable demands upon older slaves, who might have been enslaved for more extended periods of time, is reflective of the general exploitation and grave realities of enslaved life in late nineteenth-century Sierra Leone.

The disparities in demographic data between these specific clusters of runaways emphasize how different segments of people, in widely varying locations, were affected by hard labour practices. But some of the groups' shared characteristics warrant further investigation. In particular, the nine individuals from both groups of runaways were owned by eight different slave owners. Only in the group coming from near Samu were two former captives recorded as having been held by the same person. Momodoo Lammah was named as the enslaver of Bocary Worlay and Bey Fonti.<sup>27</sup> Other than Momodoo Lammah, the other seven slaveholders appear only once as the former master of a runaway, which is a strong indication that they were likely small-scale slaveholders. Therefore, these cases dealing with hard labour are potential evidence that small-scale owners were inclined to overwork their captives. We can compare this conclusion with our findings from the last case of labour exploitation in the 1875 to 1884 Register.

This final example of runaway slave arrivals to Freetown is unique for a multitude of different reasons. First, it contains the earliest chronological references to the harsh labour demands of the slave-owning class. Second, it is composed of sixty individuals, which easily constitutes the most significant collective arrival of runaways into Freetown during the entire

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161-162.

twenty-year time period of both Registers. And lastly, this large band of escaped slaves is also the only recording of new arrivals in the Registers that is entirely devoid of systematic categories or fields of information. As we know, in nearly all reports of fugitive slaves fleeing to Freetown, the colony's scribes wrote at least ten or more distinct categories of personal information onto the document's pages, which were divided into corresponding columns. In lieu of fields of personal data, scribes instead wrote out a short paragraph summary on these sixty bondspeople on the back of the last page of escaped slave entries for 1876. This passage stated,

There are 60 escaped slaves who came to 2<sup>nd</sup> Eastern District in November last but not reported, they are composed of men, women, and children and they came from the Port Locco District, they belonged to the son of the late Ali Bundoo of Port Locco and escaped because of rigorous servitude under which they had been put.<sup>28</sup>

The person who penned this statement is unknown. The passage also lacks the official signature of the Police Magistrate, W.D. Doorly, who reviewed and signed off on every other entry for 1876. On the one hand, the missing details severely weaken the historical utility of these cases, particularly concerning the names, ages, genders, and ethnicities of the people who made-up this group. However, on the other hand, the above passage is still an important and rare account that, at the very least, offers a glimpse into the work conditions, liberation, migration, and relocation of sixty former slaves from Port Lokkoh<sup>29</sup> in November of 1876.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Slavery and slave trading were heavily entrenched in the town of Port Lokkoh and its surrounding regions. In a statement that we will revisit later in this chapter, Allen Howard characterizes as Port Lokkoh as a "trans-shipment" location for goods and people, and widely known as a market where "enslaved people were bought and sold." Howard, "Nineteenth-Century Coastal Slave Trading," p. 29. Furthermore, the Registers of Escaped Slaves support Port Lokkoh's reputation as a population center with high concentrations of slavery. It is by far one of the most frequently cited places of enslavement for runaway slaves arriving in Freetown. For example, in the 1885-1884 Register, Port Lokkoh appears as the origin point for 38 former captives.

Not only does this large exodus of slaves represent one of the most unique sets of documentation on the enslaved in the Registers, but it also helps in better understanding the patterns and breadth of exploitative slave labour practices in Sierra Leone. Specifically, when these sixty runaways from Port Lokkoh are compared to the fugitive slaves from Madina and Samu, we are presented with an abundance of compelling information about potential severity of enslaved labour. The arrival of the sixty former bondspeople from Port Lokkoh evidences the dispersal of hard labour practices into the interior of the colony and its hinterlands, extending well beyond just coastal locations like Madina and Samu. Although the sixty cases from Port Lokkoh lack the necessary fields of data to identify the individual captives, its descriptive text is still useful to elucidate the demographic composition of this group, as well as the broader segments of the slave population affected by hard labour. Their account included the following phrase, “they are composed of men, women, and children.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, our example from Port Lokkoh confirms the notion that adults of many ages were likely forced to overwork for their masters, and enslaved children also suffered the same fate as their elders. Secondly, in addition to contributing to our understanding of age variations, the Port Lokkoh runaways also highlights the intersection of gender and hard labour practices in Sierra Leone. In all our previous examples of captives fleeing because of rigorous servitude, there were no listings for female slaves. Yet, in the story of the sixty runaways from the Port Lokkoh district, there is a clear reference to the presence of women among the group. The appearance of women in these cases demonstrates that at least some women were indeed overworked by their masters, just as enslaved men and children were.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Each of the personal stories examined above, from the groups originating from Madina and Samu to the account of sixty runaways fleeing the Port Lokkoh area, are found in the first Register of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1884. As seen earlier, these formerly enslaved people were adversely affected by the unrelenting work demands of their former owners. In their minds, these unspecified but harsh labour routines were considered a particularly unbearable and egregious aspect of their enslavement, directly leading to their flight from slavery. These types of cases also make it possible to track the prevalence and impact of exploitative slave labour practices in varying geographic zones of the colony and within different segments of the enslaved population. Enslaved women, men, and children of diverse ages and ethnic backgrounds were all subjugated to what was interpreted as difficult and unacceptable conditions of labour. Also, these practices did not occur in isolation, but rather they appear across the entire region, amongst small and large slaveholders alike. In the end, all our case studies from the first Register represent a call to reconsider the nature and conditions of African slavery during the late nineteenth century, particularly in the wake of the clear presence and near universality of harsh labour demands throughout the Sierra Leone colony and its hinterlands.

#### *Hard Labour Practices in the 1885 to 1894 Register of Escaped Slaves*

Comparable examples from the second Register of Escaped Slaves, which covers runaway slave arrivals to Freetown between 1885 and 1894, reaffirm these conclusions about the intensity of enslaved labour in the region. Outcries of excessive work, rigorous servitude, and analogous grievances appear in a total of 12 entries in this second Register. The first explicit indication of these rigorous work demands is found at the end of the escaped registrations for 1885. On December 12, 1885, four subjects were freed and recorded together as escaped slaves

by the colonial government in Freetown.<sup>31</sup> They had fled their owner Alikorlie Sorie on Leopard Island, which was situated just off the western coast of the Bullom Shore, a few dozen kilometers by land and sea from Freetown.<sup>32</sup> This small band of runaways consisted of two forty-five-year-old men, Saisay Bangah, who identified as Temne, and Bonnah Yomrah, a Mende. Their two other companions were a forty-year-old man named Korgbandee, who also identified as Mende, and Tenneh, a woman that was recorded as a twenty-five-year-old Sangarrah.<sup>33</sup> During their dialogue with colonial officials, Saisay, Bonnah, Korgbandee, and Sangarrah reiterated that they had suffered through both an unspecified form of mistreatment and the unyielding work demands of their former owner, Alikorlie Sorie.<sup>34</sup> There is very little information on what happened to these four after their registration, with their entries only stating that they chose to remain in an indeterminate area of Freetown.<sup>35</sup>

Approximately two years later, in January 1887, another cluster of bondspeople arrived in Freetown.<sup>36</sup> From their testimonials with colonial authorities, this group of seven runaways had fled some extremely abhorrent circumstances. Under the servitude of their former owner, Kindoe, who was listed as a “Bullom man”, the seven had been overworked, threatened with resale, and they had endured unnamed forms of abuse.<sup>37</sup> The seven survived this mistreatment and

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<sup>31</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1885-1894, p. 21. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with the following abbreviation: RES, 1885-1894.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

exploitation until they were able to find an opportunity to collectively escape. They most likely fled south from Kindoe's confines, which was listed as the small coastal village of Manika on the Bullom Shore, before crossing the Sierra Leone River and entering Freetown. Demographically, these seven subjects mostly reflected the overall diversity of the earlier group from Leopard Island, but with some slight differences. Kindoe's former captives exhibited more variation in age, gender and ethnicity. First, in addition to consisting of subjects in their 40's, 30's, and 20's, this group also included an eight-year-old boy Bullom boy named Pinta Moodoo. Second, in terms of gender, five of these runaways were male and two, Labba Tenneh and Boye Mennie, were recorded as female.<sup>38</sup> And third, the seven were listed as stemming from six distinct local ethnic groups. After reclaiming their freedom, they all resettled in the shoreside neighbourhood of Aberdeen in the northwest quadrant of the Freetown Peninsula.<sup>39</sup>

The Registers' last reference to the excessive labour demands of owners appears in February 1888.<sup>40</sup> This remark about the strenuous work of slavery appears in the Remarks field of a solitary runaway named Pharyomah. About a year after the group from Manika made it to Freetown, this twenty-one-year-old Temne man arrived in the city and reported himself as an escaped slave to colonial authorities.<sup>41</sup> According to Pharyomah, he had been enslaved by a man known as Loosannie Soso in the town of Barlor in the northern reaches of the Bullom Shore. After fleeing southward and landing in Freetown, Pharyomah outlined the motivations for his

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

escape to colonial officials, flatly declaring that he “escaped on account of hard-work.”<sup>42</sup> He expressed his desire to remain in the city as a freed person.<sup>43</sup>

References of the taxing, excessive, and unrelenting labour demands of enslaved life can be found in the testimonies of these former slaves who arrived in Freetown during the late nineteenth century. The life trajectories of the runaways from the 1885 to 1894 Register of Escaped Slaves confirm and add new insights to our earlier conclusions about the general pervasiveness of hard labour regimes throughout the region of Sierra Leone. After 1884, enslaved individuals continued to voice their grievances over being overworked by their former masters. These sorts of cases appeared in 1885, 1887, and 1888, featuring bondspeople who absconded from different places of enslavement. These locations were in the general vicinity of the Bullom Shore, but they remained relatively spread out and stretched as far as the northern Bullom town of Barlor. This dispersal of hard labour cases supports the findings from first Register for 1875 to 1884, which emphasized the presence of these harsh conditions across several geographic zones of the colony, including the Bullom Shore. The second Register, which covers 1885-1894, reaffirms the general area of the Bullom Shore as a location where many slave owners overworked their bondspeople. It also documents the spread of these practices within multiple parts of the larger area of the Shore, most notably through its occurrences in Leopard Island, Manika and Barlor.

Cases from the second Register also offer compelling evidence on the demographic diversity of people affected by harsh enslaved labour practices. The two groups who fled hard

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

labour in 1885 and 1887 were not ethnically homogenous, with the seven subjects from Manika alone representing six distinct ethnicities. This again upholds our findings that hard labour practices were not isolated to particular ethnic groups. In other words, bondspeople from many, if not all, ethnic backgrounds were susceptible to the unbridled work demands of their masters. Finally, this deployment and exploitation of slaves' labour transcended gender and age categories. Males and females, and the old and young alike, could all find themselves overworked by their owners. Bondspeople in the late nineteenth century represented valuable sources of labour that could be pressed to serve the private interests of their owners. And it was common for enslavers to take full advantage of this acquisitive nature of enslaved labour. But this inclination to overwork their human property often led to the complete breakdown of master-slave relations. The upwards of 81 hard labour cases in both Registers represent enslaved women, men, and children who not only survived unrelenting servitude but likewise found the opportunity and fortitude to escape it. Their collective outcry against the labour demands of their masters are sharp reminders of the acquisitive value of slaves and the exploitative and economically extractive labour conditions that were central to the institution of slavery.

### *The Deployment of Slaves in the Urban and Regional Economies of Sierra Leone*

In addition to the 81 entries denoting hard labour practices, the Registers also contain documentation of 33 runaways who revealed the exact work that they were forced to carry out for their owners. Many of these former slaves, for example, served as carriers and vendors of produce or other goods. Within these 33 runaway slave entries, there are explicit references to the use of slaves in the trading of at least nine distinct commodities, such as kola, rice, groundnuts, livestock, firewood, fence sticks, bamboo thatch, India rubber, and gold. This subset

of cases in the Registers are the main source-base for the second part of this chapter, which seeks to accomplish three interrelated related goals. It first seeks to reiterate the acquisitive and profit-driven nature of slavery in colonial Sierra Leone by continuing to concentrate on slave labour. Next, through an analysis of the precise work conducted by slaves, especially their deployment in agricultural, livestock, and other commercial trading networks, this final portion of the chapter aims to accentuate the interconnections between slavery and the economic prosperity of colonial Freetown and the broader region. Last of all, by approaching enslaved labour from the bottom-up, it will reveal the individual identities of the human captives who were forced to carry out these varied tasks and explore how enslaved labour influenced the personal experiences and paths to freedom of survivors of slavery colonial Sierra Leone.

### *Feeding Freetown: Slavery and the Supply of Food to the Colony*

Enslaved labour had long been used in the cultivation of food in the region of Sierra Leone. Fula, Mandingo, Susu and Temne slaveholding elites were heavily involved in the transatlantic slave trade. And while these groups supplied thousands of captives for export, they also retained more captives, especially during the height of the trade during the late eighteenth century.<sup>44</sup> As Rashid noted, they “not only profited directly from the trade in humans, but also became dependent on servile labour for food production.”<sup>45</sup> Slaves often worked in separate villages on their owners’ plantations, where would be closely supervised. Their labour was

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<sup>44</sup> Ismail Rashid, “Escape, Revolt, and Marronage in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone Hinterland,” *The Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 3, Special Issue: On Slavery and Islam in African History: A Tribute to Martin Klein (2000), p. 663.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 663-64.

arduous and strictly controlled, and they were regularly subjected to flogging, branding and other forms of violence and coercion.<sup>46</sup> In polities, like Moriah, which was located north of the Bullom Shore, slaves produced a considerable portion of the region's rice and salt.<sup>47</sup> According to Rashid, "the general strategy of the Moriah slave owners was to work newly captured slaves brutally on their rice plantations before selling off some of them to Europeans on the coast."<sup>48</sup> The use of slaves in food production was evidently a deeply-rooted component of slavery in precolonial Sierra Leone, as it was in other societies in the broader Upper Guinea Coast.<sup>49</sup>

It is therefore not shocking that after the founding of Freetown in 1792, early colonists also relied on foodstuff grown by enslaved people and supplied by the region's slaveholders. Dating to the first years of the colony, when it was administrated by the Sierra Leone Company in the late eighteenth century, officials came to count on slave-produced food from nearby communities to feed settlers, military personnel, and other residents living in Freetown. The Sierra Leone colony was, of course, originally founded as a settlement for freed slaves and a symbol of the British abolitionist cause. For the directors of the Sierra Leone Company, Sierra Leone was meant to promote the profitability of free wage labour over slavery and exemplify the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 665.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 667.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> The scholarship on the history of rice production on the Upper Guinea Coast is extensive. For examples of this historiography, see, Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2003), Edda L. Fields-Black, *Deep Roots: Rice Farmers in West Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

value of trade in ‘legitimate’ African goods versus the continued trafficking of human beings.<sup>50</sup> These high hopes, however, were quickly dashed by the inherent challenges of establishing an anti-slavery colony on a coast where slavery was deeply and extensively rooted.

As the Sierra Leone Company struggled to grow crops in Sierra Leone’s tough red soil, officials were forced to barter with local African and Euro-African slaveholders to acquire enough food to sustain the young settlement. For example, in 1793, the colony’s food stores became dangerously low and the colony faced the real prospect of starvation. Zachary Macaulay, who would later serve as Governor of Sierra Leone the following year, purchased fifty tons of rice from a local slave dealer who operated north of the colony in the Little Scarcies River. During this same period, he also contacted a slave factory in nearby Bunce Island, acquiring four more tons of the popular dietary staple.<sup>51</sup> The colony’s consumption of slave-produced directly contributed to increased demand for slave labour in its nearby communities. Moreover, despite its anti-slavery mandate, the Sierra Leone Company directors even resorted to bartering with passing slave ships for rice and other necessary supplies. Historian Padraic Scanlan pointedly summarizes this shocking intersection of slavery and colonial-abolitionist commerce in the following passage,

The Company fed its settlers, who had fled slavery in the United States, rice grown by slaves in Africa and the Carolinas. They traded commodities like rum and tobacco, distilled and grown by slaves in the Americas, for legitimate goods grown and carried by slaves in Africa. The Company built this commercial circuit to advance the cause of the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Padraic X. Scanlan *Freedom’s Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

This entanglement between the viability of colony and African slavery manifested in the policies, actions, and inaction of successive generations of colonial regimes at Sierra Leone. Throughout the nineteenth century, even as Britain slowly expanded their influence into areas outside the Freetown Peninsula, enslaved people continued to flow into and out of the colony. As Philip Misevich illustrated, slaves from southern Sierra Leone were routed to groundnut plantations north of Freetown. Passing through Freetown, slave dealers often sold off young slaves to the city's residents and kidnapped Liberated African children as additional sources of plantation labour.<sup>53</sup> Adam Jones has found similar patterns of slave trading within the colony and along its coastline. He notes that as the groundnut trade expanded in the 1840s, slaveholders in the south conveyed their slaves through the colonial environs in the north, where slaves were in high demand. After 1848, Jones states that "there were frequent reports of slaves being taken by canoe from Galinhas and Sherbro to the River Scarcies, Malakori, Kise Kise, Pongo, and Nunez."<sup>54</sup>

The colony's reliance on slave-produced goods, especially food and agricultural items, persisted into the late nineteenth century. For example, in 1889, there was a noticeably high number of runaway slaves arriving in Freetown and seeking their freedom. This forced the then Acting Colonial Administrator of Sierra Leone, Major Foster, to report a portion of the Register of Escaped Slaves for 1889, 31 entries in total, to the Secretary of the Colonies in London. This large migration of wayward slaves prompted an official debate over how to house and pay for the upkeep of so many new arrivals. Administrators like James Parkes, the Superintendent of the Native Affairs Department, saw the sudden influx of runaways into the colony in purely

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<sup>53</sup> Misevich, "Chapter 10. Freetown and "Freedom?", p. 198, 201.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, *From Slaves to Palm Kernels*, p. 83.

economic terms. He stressed that the 31 runaways only represented a fraction of the true number of ex-slaves seeking refuge in Freetown, reasoning that dozens, if not hundreds of others, arrived without reporting themselves to colonial authorities.<sup>55</sup> As a result, he warned the colonial government of the disastrous economic consequences of more accommodating fugitive slave policies, arguing that:

The immediate result is that whilst the already overcrowded labor market of Freetown is being daily augmented, a gradual depopulation of the producing Districts adjacent to the Colony is going on and we are having more consumers than producers.<sup>56</sup>

Parkes' position and rhetoric proved to be quite convincing. The colonial government did not roll out new policies or procedures to better facilitate the increased influx of runaways, with the final note on the matter stating that Governor Hay would revisit the issue of fugitive slaves at an unspecified later date.<sup>57</sup> For colonial officials, especially those who shared Superintendent Parkes' perspective, heavy-handed anti-slavery measures came at an extremely high price. In particular, they jeopardized the Sierra Leone Colony's long-rooted dependency on food and other goods that were produced and carried by enslaved peoples from within and around the colony. Just as slaveholders valued captives in relation to their economic value, some colonial administrators, like Parkes, viewed slavery, not in terms of its inherent violence, but in respect to how the inhumane practice maintained the commercial stability of the colony.

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<sup>55</sup> The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/378, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Enclosure No.1, Administrator Foster to The Right Honorable Lord Knutsford GCMG, August 22, 1889.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/378, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Despatch #18120, Mr. Meade to Acting Governor of Sierra Leone, September 13, 1889.

In the Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894, there are a sum of 18 runaway slave reports that directly reference the deployment of individual slaves in carrying and selling various food products into colonial Freetown. Their entries across the twenty years of the Registers are stark reminders of the economic exploitation of bondspeople in late nineteenth-century Sierra Leone, especially concerning the utilization of enslaved women, men, and children along local trading routes and within the broader interregional Sierra Leone-Guinea commercial system. These 18 former slaves revealed how their masters forced them to work in the transport and sale of a variety of local staples, including kola, groundnuts, rice, and cattle. The retelling of their experiences illustrates the ways in which forced labour shaped the lives of ordinary slaves and sometimes even produced the circumstances leading to self-liberation.

Of the 18 cases referencing the flow of foodstuff into the colony, three runaways specifically mentioned their work in the kola trade. For example, in the first escaped slave report for 1884, a runaway named Choe explicitly alluded to his work in the kola trade. Choe was listed as male, fifteen years old, and of Temne-descent.<sup>58</sup> He identified a man named Foday Soosoo as his former master and his place of enslavement as the northern town of Kambia, on the Great Scarcies River near the present-day Sierra Leone-Guinea border.<sup>59</sup> Before his registration on January 9, 1884, Choe told colonial officials that Foday Soosoo had brought him from Kambia to Freetown, making him bring kola nuts for the purposes of trade. After his arrival in the city, the young captive refused to return to Kambia with Soosoo and eventually escaped to colonial authorities.<sup>60</sup> After reporting himself as an escaped slave, Choe was placed under the care of

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<sup>58</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 205.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

Henry Vincent, who lived on Pademba Road in the Portuguese Town neighbourhood of Freetown.<sup>61</sup>

The following year, in July 1885, another runaway conveyed an analogous account of toiling in the city's kola nut trade.<sup>62</sup> In this instance, Sandy, an enslaved eighteen-year-old Gallinas male, was brought from British Sherbro to Freetown via canoe by his slave master Momodoo Allie.<sup>63</sup> Sandy was ordered to participate in the sale of kola nuts while in the city. However, their trading mission would take an unexpected turn. Probably before departing back to Allie's confines in Sherbro territory, Sandy was left alone in a canoe near King Jimmy wharf in Freetown. With apparently little hesitation, he jumped overboard, swam ashore, and immediately ran to a police station.<sup>64</sup> In the custody of the colonial government, he explained that Allie ill-treated him and after being personally informed that "all slaves who came to this place are free," he decided to escape.<sup>65</sup> He was officially registered as a runaway slave in Freetown on July 13, 1885. After regaining his freedom, Sandy resettled at the home of a Sergeant Cattell of the colonial police force.<sup>66</sup>

Sandy and Choe's entries reveal some of the factors and lived experiences that characterized enslaved labour in Sierra Leone. Their entries demonstrate the important and central role of slavery in providing produce to the residents of colonial Freetown. In addition to

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 9 -10.

highlighting two of the real individuals who were coerced into the kola trade, their reports in the Registers chart the actual movement of captives around the colony and the physical spaces that they occupied in their deployment as the carriers and vendors of kola nuts. Sandy was held in the northern town of Kambia, over one hundred kilometers from colonial Freetown. In turn, Choe was enslaved even further away to the south in Sherbro. But both had been driven southwards and northwards for the purposes of conducting trade. In outlining their movement into and outside the colony, Sandy and Choe's entries, therefore, highlight the potentially common presence of slaves along long-established interregional trading routes. In particular, the descriptions of their trading missions serve to place these two ex-slaves on the roads, shoreline, and waterways of Howard's Coastal Corridor of the Sierra Leone-Guinea commercial system, which circulated people and trade goods through Freetown and along the Atlantic littoral of the present-day republics of Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Along with references to kola, there were a total of four reports of fugitives who described hauling either rice or groundnuts. These case studies reveal the presence and roles of slaves along trading routes that linked the Sierra Leone Colony to the interior town of Port Lokkoh and its surrounding environs. Port Lokkoh, which was located nearly one hundred kilometers northeast of Freetown, was connected to coastal trade, as well as to interior commercial routes running east and west via the Falaba Road trading corridor. According to Howard, Port Lokkoh was well known as a "trans-shipment" point and a prominent market to procure and sell off captives.<sup>67</sup> The following case studies spotlight and underscore this

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<sup>67</sup> Howard, "Nineteenth-Century Coastal Slave Trading," p. 29.

intersection of slavery and the circulation of produce through Port Lokkoh and colonial Freetown during the late nineteenth century.

Rice continued meet the dietary needs of Freetownians during the late nineteenth century, appearing in the Registers as one of the food items delivered by captives to the city. The use of slaves in the rice trade, as well as along the trading circuit between Freetown and Port Lokkoh, is well illustrated in the case of an adolescent runaway named Tambah. This eleven-year-old Temne-Lokkoh boy was registered as an escaped slave by the Sierra Leone colonial government on May 26, 1886.<sup>68</sup> After he presented himself to colonial authorities in Freetown, Tambah retold a narrative of his enslavement, including the details of his labour as a captive and the factors that shaped his eventual flight. His story helps to shine needed light on the specific work of enslaved people in Sierra Leone and the often volatile nature of slave-master relationships.

Tambah had been taken south by his master, Pa Kabbie, from their residence in Port Lokkoh to Freetown for trading purposes. Pa Kabbie had specifically tasked the young slave with the carrying and selling rice to Freetown residents.<sup>69</sup> Yet, this trip was anything but typical for either of them. According to Tambah's Remarks column, shortly after their arrival in Freetown, the owner and slave became engaged in a contentious dispute with an unnamed local woman. She had accused Kabbie of stealing some cloth from her. The woman was so certain of the slave master's guilt that she quickly tracked down and spoke with Tambah personally. When questioned about the missing cloth by the woman, the young captive admitted that his master was indeed guilty of this thievery.<sup>70</sup> Outraged from this apparent betrayal, Pa Kabbie threatened

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

to sell Tambah to another slave owner in Port Lokkoh, after they concluded their business in Freetown.<sup>71</sup> Unwilling to allow himself to be resold to a new and unfamiliar owner, Tambah immediately fled Kabbie's clutches and reported himself to colonial authorities. His entry in the 1885 to 1894 Register of Escaped Slaves notes the now freed child was to be cared for by Mrs. Eliza Williams in the Clines Town neighbourhood of Freetown.<sup>72</sup> This case study also reveals that enslavement was entangled with commercial ties and interpersonal relationships, as the condition of one's captivity was at stake when they revealed information about slaveholders.

Slaves carrying groundnuts also populated the waterways, roads, and other trading routes that connected Freetown to the vicinity of Port Lokkoh. The groundnut trade is explicitly mentioned in the Remarks' field of three fugitive slaves in the Registers. Two of these individuals, like Tambah, had also specified Port Lokkoh or its surrounding regions as their former places of enslavement before they were taken to Freetown to trade. In fact, many of the same elements of Tambah's story of self-liberation appear in the entry for a thirteen-year-old Temne boy named Lamina, who was registered in February 1878.<sup>73</sup> He was previously held by a slave master known as Bocarry, who resided near the Port Lokkoh River.<sup>74</sup> In his dialogue with British officials, Lamina revealed the drudgery of his work for Bocarry, as well as the details of his flight to freedom. His master also made him carry bushels of groundnuts to sale in the markets of Freetown. However, while hauling this produce in the city, Lamina's life would take a drastic turn. In a stroke of good luck, he encountered his older brother, Lokkoh, who had also

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 52.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

been enslaved by another slaveholder in Port Lokkoh.<sup>75</sup> According to Lamina's statement to colonial officials, upon finding his brother on the streets of Freetown, the two immediately decided to report themselves as escaped slaves. Lokkoh's entry in the Register appears directly above Lamina's.<sup>76</sup> As recently liberated minors, they were placed under the supervision of two Freetown residents, Lokkoh, with James Wilson of Circular Road and young Lamina with Joseph Ogoo of Goderich Street.<sup>77</sup> After being torn apart by slavery, the two brothers ended up resettling only a few blocks from each other in the colony.

From these analyses, it is evident that kola, rice, groundnuts, and other consumable produce were carried and sold by enslaved people in late nineteenth-century Sierra Leone. Yet these locally grown food items were not the only staples that were supplied by captives. In the Registers of Escaped Slaves for the period of 1875 to 1894, there were a total of seven different subjects who told accounts of their previous deployment in the highly profitable livestock trade to the city. After the 1860's, Freetown was the major population center in the region, and many of the city's inhabitants earned enough income to purchase meat as a dietary staple. The staff of the colonial government, including naval and military personnel stationed at the colony and the crews of transient ships, all contributed to this strong demand for meat protein.<sup>78</sup> Historian Alusine Jalloh estimated that over 60 percent of the cattle traded in Sierra Leone during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had originated from the Futa Jallon in the Guinean highlands,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>78</sup> Howard, "Contesting Commercial Space," p. 240.

where Fula cattlemen raised large herds that were sold across the region.<sup>79</sup> Freetownian butchers acquired the cattle typically through middlemen who already purchased and transported livestock from the interior. Butchers then slaughtered and prepared the beef for consumers in the city.<sup>80</sup>

With the strong demand for beef among the Freetown populace, the livestock trade constituted an integral component of the food supply to the colony and, therefore, a key strand in the colonial economy. The Registers offer valuable evidence on the utilization of bondspeople in this important and lucrative commerce, with seven ex-slaves revealing their role in supplying oxen, bulls, or other types of cattle to Freetown meat markets. Like the runaways who were involved in the agricultural food trades, the accounts of these seven slaves similarly capture the physical movements of slaves within and outside the colony, especially along the interior trading routes connecting Sierra Leone to cattle-raising areas of the Futa Jallon.<sup>81</sup>

Demographically, this dataset of seven runaways in the cattle trade exhibited similar characteristics as their counterparts who hauled agricultural produce, but with some slight variations. Young male slaves were also predominantly utilized in the corralling and sale of

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<sup>79</sup> Jalloh, *African Entrepreneurship*, p. 33; Howard, “Contesting Commercial Space,” 240-241.

<sup>80</sup> Howard, “Contesting Commercial Space,” p. 241. In the 1875 to 1884 Register of Escaped Slaves, a runaway slave mentioned her brief encounter with one of these local butchers in colonial Freetown. On October 26, 1882, a forty-year-old Mendi woman named Phantahah was formally recorded in the Register of Escaped Slaves. According to her Remarks field, she was brought to Freetown by her former owner, Barbar, who concealed her in a house belonging to a Mandingo Freetown butcher. Phantahah specifically described this butcher as a man “who slaughters oxen for sale.” With the help of her sister, who also resided in Freetown, she escaped her captors and reported herself as a runaway slave with the colonial government. After reclaiming her freedom, Phantahah remained in Freetown, staying with her sister, Nancy Pratty of Kissy Street. RES., 1875-1884, p. 165-164.

<sup>81</sup> All seven of the runaways who were involved in the cattle trade had been previously enslaved in towns or villages located inland, mostly to the northeast of Freetown. These places of enslavement were part and parcel of the water and land paths linking the Sierra Leone Colony to the Futa Jallon and other inland locations. Moria, Futa, and Rogbom appear as the points of origin for five of the seven runaways who worked in the livestock trade. RES, 1875-1884, p. 30, 68, 157, 189, 191.

livestock. This is especially reflected in the story of two fugitive slaves who were registered on July 5, 1881.<sup>82</sup> These two runaways were named Mussa Kongie and Sarrah, and they were brought to Freetown by their master, Marah Modoo.<sup>83</sup> They began their journey in a village or town located in the region of the Northern Rivers,<sup>84</sup> before heading south towards the colony. The two captives were tasked with the transport and care of thirteen oxen to sell to Freetown consumers. In the city, they endured an unspecified form of mistreatment at the hands of Marah Modoo, and “knowing themselves to be slaves,” they fled to officials of the British administration.<sup>85</sup> Mussa Kongie was recorded as a seventeen-year-old Korankoh male, and Sarrah was identified as a fifteen-year-old Solima male.<sup>86</sup> Their corresponding ages and gender were generally emblematic of the demographic composition of all the runaways who also previously laboured in the livestock trade. Of these seven total cases dealing with the sale of cattle, five subjects were recorded as being under twenty years old at the time of their escape, and six were listed as male. Two subjects, on the other hand, could be characterized as demographic outliers within this dataset of seven entries.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Historian Winston McGowan defined the term “Northern Rivers”, explaining that it was used by the British at Sierra Leone to “refer to the Rio Grande, Nunez, Pongas, Dubreka, Mellacourie, Kise-Kise, Great Scarcies, Small Scarcies, and other rivers that flowed into the Atlantic Ocean between Portuguese Guinea and Sierra Leone.” Furthermore, as McGowan outlined, the Northern Rivers were alternatively referred to as the Southern Rivers by the French in Senegal and that these rivers were linked to interior trading routes connected to or originating in the Futa Jallon. Winston McGowan, “The Establishment of Long-Distance,” p. 27.

<sup>85</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 126.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

First, an escaped slave known as Bocary Sorie was recorded as a twenty-five-year-old runaway on July 21, 1883.<sup>87</sup> His labour deployment contrasts with the seemingly pervasive use of male children and teenagers in the cattle trade, given that he was an adult aged slave. Bocary was of Lokkoh-descent, and he had listed Rogbom as his place of enslavement. He also identified Oomaroo, a Fula man, as his former owner. After fleeing Oomaroo in Freetown, colonial scribes recorded the following passage in the Remarks field of his entry in the Register: “Came with his master with some oxen for sale and from ill-treatment refused to return — he desires to remain here for freedom.”<sup>88</sup> After he was freed from slavery, Bocary took up residence with a Mormah Saisai of Fourah Bay Road in the Magazine District of Freetown.<sup>89</sup>

Second, the entry of the runaway known as Jeley Carnee presents even more variation to the demographic make-up of the bondspeople deployed in the sale of meat in colonial Freetown. Jeley Carnee was not only a woman, but she was also an older adult, with scribes listing her as thirty-five years old. In the process of registering as an escaped slave, she disclosed the conditions of her servitude under her mistress, Hawa Silah. Her Remarks column captured the exploitation of her labour in supplying cattle, her journey to Freetown from outside the colony, and her mistreatment at the hands of her mistress. In particular, the slave mistress Silah had sold off Jeley’s daughter, which immediately prompted her escape.<sup>90</sup> Her narrative in the Register documents the consequences of enslaved labour in the cattle trade, underscoring the acquisitive value of bondspeople in colonial Sierra Leone, as well as the fragility of slave-master relations.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 191-192.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

The reports for both Jeley Carnee and Bocary Sorie further document how paths to freedom were set in motion by the rigours of slave labour practices. Freetownian butchers and everyday consumers drove up the demand for beef in the late nineteenth century, and Jeley and Bocary's masters sought to fully capitalize on these potential profits. To maximize their returns, these masters drew on the free labour of their slaves and voluntarily brought them to Freetown to offload cattle. While they were meant to serve the business interests of their masters, Jeley and Bocary used these trading missions as openings to free themselves by reporting to colonial authorities stationed in the city. Moreover, the entries for these two former captives shed light on the demographic composition of slaves deployed in the cattle industry at Sierra Leone, especially in terms of age and gender. Most of the runaways who laboured in this commercial sector were categorized as male teenagers or children. However, the case studies of thirty-five-year-old Jeley and twenty-five-year-old Bocary evidences an additional reliance on enslaved adults in the colony's livestock trade. Jeley's entry also confirms the presence of enslaved women in supplying and vending meat in Freetown markets. Together, both case studies suggest a potentially wide-ranging selection of captives who were used in the vital and lucrative supply of meat to Freetown from cattle-raising areas surrounding the colony.

*Miscellaneous Work: Slavery, Petty Commerce, and the Sale of Valuable Commodities*

Just as the growth of Freetown's population required a constant and abundant supply of food, it also created a reliable market for a plethora of commodities and consumer products. Howard's study of the commercial development of colonial Sierra Leone stressed that "furnishing a growing city with food and other commodities necessitated a complex organization

and continuous flow of people, boats, and goods from the hinterland.”<sup>91</sup> Interior traders, both women and men, flooded the wholesales, shops, and marketplaces of Freetown with a wide selection of items, including locally-made goods like baskets, gourds, leather, and medicinal products. Building materials and fuel were essential items for late-nineteenth-century urban living and were thus in high demand in the city. And as Howard notes, local traders met this demand by conveying large quantities of mangrove poles, lime, shingles, thatch, logs, and charcoal to Freetown.<sup>92</sup> This flow of commodities into Freetown constituted a vibrant and booming trade during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Jalloh, colonial regimes encouraged this influx of essential goods and other products because “it provided a tax base through the use of custom duties, which supplied the bulk of the revenue needed to support the administration and public services without expenses to the British taxpayer.”<sup>93</sup> Commodity trading, which consisted of both luxury and everyday items from outside the colony, was an integral component of the Sierra Leonean economy during the colonial period.

Moreover, this element of the colonial economy was sustained on the work of enslaved people and was, therefore, intricately connected to the practice of slavery in Sierra Leone. Using the Registers of Escaped Slaves, the paragraphs below will reveal the life trajectories and identities of the enslaved people who were coerced into petty commercial trades and the sale of valuable commodities in Freetown. There is a total of 11 entries that specifically reveal presence of slaves in these particular commercial trades. In their explanations for escaping to the city, a

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<sup>91</sup> Howard, “Contesting Commercial Space,” p. 240.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>93</sup> Jalloh, *African Entrepreneurship*, p. 76.

total of seven runaway slaves mentioned their previous involvement in the carrying and vending of a variety of relatively inexpensive commercial products, such as firewood, bamboo thatch, and fence sticks. Broadly, these seven cases build upon our findings concerning the economic connection between Freetown and the rest of the colony and locations further away. Through the lens of these petty trading cases, we can explore the deeper layers, variations, and directions of commerce between the urban marketplaces and everyday consumers of Freetown and the smaller towns and rural villages in the colony's coastal and inland areas. By spotlighting the personal information and testimonies of runaway slaves, these entries will allow us to identify and piece together the plurality of enslaved people and experiences that sustained the colony's vital trading routes and networks of commerce.

The Registers contain five explicit references to owners using their slaves as carriers of firewood. The first example of a captive's participation in the firewood trade appears on September 19, 1879.<sup>94</sup> On this date, a male teenager named Bocarry Santarreh reported himself as an escaped slave from the interior of the colony. Bocarry also stated his age as fourteen years old and his ethnicity as Temne. When probed further by colonial authorities, he revealed the identity of his owner and the specific circumstances that pushed him to self-liberate in Freetown.<sup>95</sup> He had been previously owned by a man named Pa Cammareh in a village near the Port Lokkoh River. Under Pa Cammareh, he and several other slaves were marched down to Freetown for the purposes of selling firewood in the city.<sup>96</sup> Yet, Bocarry appeared to have some knowledge of Freetown as a potential place of refuge for fleeing slaves. He reiterated to colonial

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<sup>94</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 79.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 79-80.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

scribes that “knowing himself a slave,” he had refused to leave the city with Pa Cammareh and his fellow bondspeople.<sup>97</sup> After his liberation, it was recorded that Bocarry chose to reside in an unspecified location of Freetown.<sup>98</sup>

Nearly a year later, another enslaved minor made a similar appeal to colonial officials. In August 1880, a twelve-year-old Temne boy named Choe was taken to Freetown by his master, Kormeh.<sup>99</sup> Choe, whom colonial officials indicated had also gone by the alias “Joe,” viewed this visit to the city as an opportune chance to escape slavery, or as scribes recorded, to “claim his freedom.”<sup>100</sup> The young slave did just this and sought refuge with colonial officials in Freetown. He was formally liberated from slavery and recorded in the Register on August 7, 1880.<sup>101</sup> In the custody of colonial authorities, Choe explained his former master’s motivations for taking him to Freetown from their residence in nearby Koya country. He revealed that the trip was a trading mission, explicitly stating that he and his master had come to the city to sell firewood. As a formerly enslaved minor and a new arrival, the government placed Choe under the care of Mrs. Martha King, a widow, who resided on Fourah Bay Road in northwest Freetown.<sup>102</sup>

This next mention of selling firewood in Freetown came on July 12, 1883, in the entry for a thirty-year old Temne runaway named Kehsoe.<sup>103</sup> The retelling of his enslavement and

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 105-106.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

eventual escape offers insight on several important elements about the practice of slavery in late nineteenth-century Sierra Leone. Kehsoe conveyed that he was formerly enslaved in Port Lokkoh and owned by a man named, Lamina Kong-ko.<sup>104</sup> In the days or weeks leading to his escape, Lamina had brought him southwest to Freetown, carrying cords of firewood to sell in the city. But while selling his owner's cache of firewood, young Kehsoe found the opportunity to escape and seek refuge with colonial authorities. As members of the British administration interviewed him, he stressed the fact that he had been continuously resold to different masters and "takes advantage of remaining here for freedom."<sup>105</sup> At the end his Remarks entry, scribes transliterated the young man's request to remain with a resident named Samuel S. Bowling of Priscilla Street in central Freetown.<sup>106</sup>

Kehsoe's account contains the last reference of selling firewood in the first Register of Escaped Slaves. In the second Register, which continued to document runaway slave arrivals from 1885 to 1894, the first mention of the firewood trade in Freetown shows up in the 1886 report for a wayward young slave named Barrakkah.<sup>107</sup> This fourteen-year-old Temne male was the former property of a man named Lallifoo Carkentree. He was held at the seaside village of Yongoro on the Bullom Shore, about one dozen kilometers north of Freetown.<sup>108</sup> Before his escape, the slave master Carkentree drove Barrakkah and other slaves south across the Sierra Leone River to the shores of Freetown. This journey to the city, like other examples that we have covered, was

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 34.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 34-35.

ostensibly for business purposes. However, Carkentree's volatility as a slave master appeared to alter the itinerary of this trip. In the city, and for unspecified reasons, Carkentree threatened to sell Barrakkah to another slaveholder in exchange for at least two or more oxen.<sup>109</sup>

Faced with the uncertainties and potential dangers of servitude under a new owner, Barrakkah refused to obey Carkentree's demands and sought out sanctuary with the British administration in Freetown. He was registered as an escaped slave and officially granted his freedom on November 8, 1886.<sup>110</sup> As colonial authorities took down his personal information and the circumstances of his escape, young Barrakkah divulged more details about his trip to Freetown, disclosing that he and Carkentree's other slaves had carried and been instructed to sell firewood to the city's inhabitants. After his liberation, colonial officials recorded that he was to reside in the home of Mr. Henry Coker of Percival Street in central Freetown.<sup>111</sup> In fully explaining the factors surrounding his escape, Barrakkah's entry in the Register, once again draws attention to the use of enslaved labour in the colony's firewood trade, emphasizing the movement real individuals who were forced to partake in this particular commerce.

Together, each of the above case studies demonstrate the distinctly human experiences that characterized the work of slaves in the firewood trade. All of the runaways we examined were Temne males, and they ranged in age from twelve to fourteen years old. Therefore, their presence in the Registers indicates that enslaved boys and teenagers were potentially widely relied upon in supplying Freetownians with necessary commercial goods. These cases also underscore some of the consequences of the interconnections between slavery and the colony's

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

diverse commercial sector, as Bocarry, Choe, Kehsoe, and Barrakkah each used their owners' trading missions to Freetown as opportunities to self-liberate and end their enslavement. These findings, as well as the relationship between Freetown consumers and slaveholders in the hinterlands of the colony, can be bolstered by briefly exploring the utilization of slaves in other vital, but relatively inexpensive commercial trades.

In particular, there are two examples of ex-slaves in the Registers evidencing the deployment of slaves in the sale of commonly used building materials, such as fence sticks and bamboo thatch.<sup>112</sup> The first of these examples was a fourteen year old Lokkoh slave who was registered on January 10, 1878.<sup>113</sup> He had previously been enslaved near the Port Lokkoh River, northeast of Freetown, by a Kroo person known as Tain Kroo.<sup>114</sup> After learning Sorrie's story, scribes recorded the following summary in his Remarks field,

This lad came with his master to Freetown with some fence stick for sale on the 9<sup>th</sup> instant being informed that all slaves coming to this place are free, took the opportunity of running to the Police Constable Walter Albert. No. 106. And report his circumstances to him.<sup>115</sup>

In his dialogue with British officials, Sorrie had evidently specified the work he performed for his owner, which, like many others, involved the selling of commercial products in Freetown. In

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<sup>112</sup> In addition to these two entries of runaway slaves, an additional subject was also involved in this building materials trade in Freetown. However, his involvement in this petty trade occurred while he was a free person in the colony. Beareh, or Charles Williams, was a thirty-five-year-old Temne man who was formerly held in slavery on the Bullom Shore. He was registered as an escaped slave by the colonial government on June 17, 1877. In his dialogue with the authorities in Freetown, Charles revealed that he was procuring fence sticks in Koya country before an unidentified man and woman seized him and sold him into slavery. After six months in captivity, he made his escape on canoe in the Sierra Leone River and after calling out for help, he was rescued by a resident named W.M. Shaw. Charles was immediately brought to Freetown, where he was officially liberated from slavery. RES, 1875-1884, p. 36-37.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 50-51.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

this case, Tain Kroo had forced Sorrie to transport and sell fence sticks in the city's urban markets. After his liberation, the ex-slave requested to remain in the colony at the home of Emily Williams of Charlotte Street in Freetown.<sup>116</sup>

Approximately three years later, in May of 1881, another teenage runaway presented himself to the colonial government at Freetown, also outlining how his owner used him to peddle everyday consumer goods in the city.<sup>117</sup> This runaway slave was registered on May 7, 1881, and colonial scribes recorded him as Mormoh Fett, a fourteen-year-old Temne who was enslaved in Port Lokkoh.<sup>118</sup> Before his flight, Mormoh was previously owned by Larwooroo, who was also listed as a Temne. During the last week of April 1881, Larwooroo brought Mormoh and his other slaves to Freetown to sell bamboo thatch, which likely had a high demand as a vital material for construction and repairing homes and other buildings in the city. After carrying the bamboo thatch into Freetown from Port Lokkoh and selling it for ten days,<sup>119</sup> as Mormoh had told colonial officials, the young slave found an opening to flee the clutches of Lawooroo. In his Remarks field in the Register, scribes summarized the circumstances leading to his escape by stating, "knowing himself to be a slave, refused to return and thus claimed freedom."<sup>120</sup>

This set of two cases studies illuminate the life trajectories of Sorrie Lokkoh and Mormoh Fett. Each of these formerly enslaved minors was deployed by their owners in the sale of fence sticks and bamboo thatch, respectively. Like the firewood trade, these building materials were

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 121-122.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

items of necessity in late nineteenth-century Freetown and thus were in high demand amongst the city's residents. Both subjects were listed as fourteen-years old males, which reaffirms patterns of slave deployment observed in cases dealing with the sale of firewood. Their work further indicates that adolescent male slaves may have been commonly coerced into supplying Freetown retailers and residents with building materials and other essential goods. Moreover, Sorrie and Mormoh were from Port Lokkoh or its nearby regions, just like a few of the runaways who had hauled firewood for their owners. Sorrie and Mormoh's involvement in petty trade from this general location also exemplifies and confirms the profound commercial interchange between colonial Freetown and Port Lokkoh, an interior town that was a center for the distribution of consumer goods and a well-known trafficking point for the trade in human beings.

Slave masters also coerced and trusted their captives in the transport and sale of other valuable commodities into Freetown. In total, there are three explicit references to the transport and sale of India rubber and gold from the interiors of the colony to the urban center of Freetown. These cases deviate slightly from the patterns of trade in the entries dealing with firewood, fence sticks, and bamboo thatch. Most notably, the runaway slaves working in the trading of rubber and gold were quite diverse demographically, consisting of adolescent males and adult women and men. This evidence suggests that the colony's trading circuits for commercial goods were likely populated and sustained by enslaved children, but also by older male and female slaves as well.

India rubber is the first of these commodities to appear in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, showing up as part of the Remarks field of an individual runaway named Carfulla in

November 1878.<sup>121</sup> Colonial scribes transcribed Carfulla's recount of captivity and flight with the ensuing text,

Came with his master from Tyanna with some India Rubber for sale and having been informed by some of his countrymen that slaves coming to this place are free, refused to return with his master, arrived here about ten days ago. Claimed his freedom yesterday.<sup>122</sup>

Carfulla was officially listed as a forty-year-old male, and he identified himself as part of the Korankoh ethnic group. He named his former master as a person called Sittapha, and after his liberation, he was to be placed with Yelli Bahi, whose location in Freetown was left undisclosed.<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, his dialogue with British officials in Freetown capture his experiences as an enslaved person, from his fortunate encounter with his countrymen, which pushed him to flee, to his deployment in the colony's rubber trade.

Another runaway did not report his work with rubber until nearly eight years later in the lengthy entry of another Korankoh male named Shambah. While Carfulla was listed as forty years old by the colonial government, Shambah was only thirteen years old when he was registered on July 20, 1886.<sup>124</sup> His Remarks field in the Register is richly detailed, with colonial scribes recording and summarizing a great deal of his testimony. His entry states:

Came with his master and others with India rubber for sale; from advice he had from an old slave, coupled with the ill treatment of his master, refuses to return — desires to remain here for freedom. Recommended to be registered under the care of Miss Letitie Hardesty of Charlotte Street, Freetown. This lad had been decoyed from the Settlement to

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 62-63.

<sup>124</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 23.

Rosint Bullom Shore and there sold into slavery, was recovered.<sup>125</sup>

This narrative reveals important aspects of a young slave's life trajectory in Sierra Leone. First, it is one of a very few runaway slave reports that explicitly state the circumstances of the subject's original enslavement. Shambah was kidnapped from within the colony and then sold into slavery, possibly to Mamadoo Yellie, who he identified as his former owner. Second, the account also outlines the factors that precipitated his flight from Mamadoo Yellie, and namely Shambah's realization, through an older slave's advice, that the colonial government offered sanctuary to enslaved people. And lastly, Shambah's testimony described how his master used him and other slaves in the transport and sale of Indian rubber in Freetown, thus highlighting the presence and role of enslaved labour in supplying Freetown with important commodities from within the colony and beyond.

In addition to the trade of India rubber, slaves were also forced to bring in and peddle precious metals such as gold to Freetown. While many of the enslaved in Sierra Leone were likely coerced into the gold trade, as was the case in other locations in West Africa,<sup>126</sup> there is only one single report in the Registers that documents the implementation of bondspeople in this

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>126</sup> Regarding slavery and the gold trade in precolonial Sierra Leone, Scanlan recently stated, "The Fula brought and sold all kinds of goods, but they were especially known as gold traders, transporting 'country rings' of standardized sizes around their wrists and around the wrists of their slaves." Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtor's*, p. 34. Slavery in other areas of West Africa were similarly linked to goldmining. In his study of the Gold Coast Colony, for example, historian Trevor Getz pointed out that slaves served their masters as gold takers and goldsmiths. Trevor R. Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa: Toward Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), p. 19. Paul E. Lovejoy observed similar connections in his discussion of gold mining on the Senegalese coast during the sixteenth century. Ruminating on the subject, he stated that "the role of slaves in gold production suggests that here was another sector in which slavery had become crucial to the economy." Lovejoy, *Transformations*, p. 33.

type of commerce. This reference to the gold trade through Freetown appears in the entry for a seventeen-year-old Jarlongkoh girl named Jaimalah.<sup>127</sup> She was originally enslaved in Bureh country, around the region of Port Lokkoh. Her former owner, who she identified as Carimoo Luray, had marched her south carrying gold to sell in Freetown markets.<sup>128</sup> Yet, after an unspecified period of time in the city, Jaimalah was no longer able to endure Luray's mistreatment and decided to flee to the safety of colonial authorities. Based on her Remarks field, she explicitly referenced her involvement in moving gold to Freetown, stating that they "brought gold for sale."<sup>129</sup> She also provided additional details on her escape from Luray, explaining that the slaveholder had, in fact, threatened to re-sell her to someone else while they were in the city.<sup>130</sup> Reluctant to face the potential dangers of a new master, Jaimalah refused to return home with Luray and reported herself to colonial authorities. She was officially liberated and recorded in the Register of Escaped Slaves on February 24, 1889.<sup>131</sup> The colonial government noted that she would be relocated to the home of an Adama Lonteh on Fisher Street in Freetown.<sup>132</sup> While this is the only appearance of the gold trade, Jaimalah's narrative and lived experiences represent another example of the precise work slaves were assigned during the late nineteenth century, as well as stress the centrality of the enslaved along trading and supply routes of the colony and in the commerce in precious metals within Freetown itself.

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<sup>127</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 47.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 47-48.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has analyzed the types of labour that enslaved people performed in nineteenth-century Sierra Leone. The case studies presented in this chapter also offer a window into the world that surrounded bondsmen and bondswomen. These individuals formed part of thriving societies and commercial networks that extended from interior regions of the colony to the coastal city of Freetown. This chapter, therefore, provides an in-depth analysis of the interplay between slave labour and the economy of a colony that was originally founded for liberated slaves. It began with three important vignettes that expose the presence and widespread nature of exploitative practices in the region. This chapter then considered the experiences of enslaved people, as they endured hard labour in the interior areas and along commercial networks. My observations make several important interventions. The entries from the Register of Escaped Slaves emphasize slavery's connection to control and the exploitation of slave labour, which suggests that slavery was more severe than previously understood. Harsh labour was also a widespread reality that was not simply concentrated in certain locations or segments of the enslaved population. My analysis of the Register of Escaped Slaves also reveals vital information on individual self-liberated Africans, slaveholders, and colonial officials. There was great diversity among runaway slaves, as well as significant diversity of small-scale and large-scale slaveholders who previously owned the enslaved. Finally, the chapter also considered the methods, strategies, and outcomes of colonial policies that were implemented to handle the sudden arrival of dozens of runaway slaves.

The second half of this chapter analyzes and assesses new evidence on the work and geographic movement of individual bondsmen and bondswomen. My case studies show that enslaved people toiled in different kinds of commerce, including agriculture, livestock, petty

commerce, and the traffic of firewood, gold, and rubber. These case studies also underscore the widespread nature of slavery in Sierra Leone because ex-slaves arrived in Freetown from a wide range of urban and rural settings. This analysis of slaves' tasks also sheds light on the variety of skilled and unskilled labour that enslaved people performed on an everyday basis. In short, enslaved people were an integral part of food production and commodity trading, which sustained the inhabitants and the broader economy of Sierra Leone. The coerced involvement of bondspeople in Sierra Leone's commercial networks adds dynamism to the forced migration of ex-slaves, and more importantly, it illuminates the multiple strategies that these individuals employed to self-liberate. Former slaves relied on knowledge and opportunity to find ways to flee from slave owners, report the conditions of their captivity, and claim legal freedom.

In explaining the circumstances of their enslavement, these self-liberated slaves ultimately revealed that the core tenets of the colony's economic system were built, sustained, and advanced by the work slaves and the prevalence of slavery in the region. Yet, the strict control and exploitative utilization of enslaved labour was not the only factor that shaped this profound connection between slavery and the economic prosperity of the colony. The interplay between enslavement and Sierra Leone's economic systems was also upheld by raw violence, tyranny, and shocking abuses. These patterns of mistreatment, which slaveholders used to punish and placate their human property, are the focus of the following two chapters.

## CHAPTER 4

### SLAVE MISTREATMENT IN COLONIAL SIERRA LEONE: THE THREAT OF RE-SALE AS ILL TREATMENT

#### *Introduction: Three Accounts of Slave Mistreatment in Late Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone*

The Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1884 provide an opportunity to study the challenges and painful realities that shaped the lives of enslaved people in colonial Sierra Leone. The following three case studies from different years of the Registers offer a glimpse into the violence and vulnerability of enslaved life during this period. On April 21, 1883, two twenty-five-year-old Gallinas men, Foday and Canray Vavah, along with a twenty-year-old Mende woman named Gbanjah, were registered as escaped slaves in Freetown.<sup>1</sup> All three runaways were previously owned by a woman named Hannah Pleasant, a British subject, who resided in the town of Port Lokkoh. In the Remarks column of their entries, Foday, Canray and Gbanjah each described the details of their flight to Freetown, which was nearly cut short near the coastal town of Pepel. On their journey southwest from Port Lokkoh to Freetown, they were suddenly recaptured and severely punished by local slave traders in the area. The runaways were put into stocks for three straight days, as their new captors prepared to sell them off to different slave owners. However, this seemingly dire situation did not deter Foday, Canray, and Gbanjah.

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1875-1884, p. 32. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with following abbreviation: RES, 1875-1884.

Shortly after they were taken out of their stocks, the three runaways quickly stole a nearby canoe and fled to Freetown, where they were officially liberated from slavery.<sup>2</sup>

About three years later, a forty-year old Korankoh woman named Damlay Coray, also arrived in Freetown as a runaway slave. She too fled her slave owner due to mistreatment, but unlike Foday, Canray, and Gbanjah, her abuse mainly stemmed from a broken covenant with her owner. In January 1885, Coray was formally reported as an escaped slave with the colonial government.<sup>3</sup> She had fled her master, Mormodo Yoram, in Ro Wharf Koya, trekking approximately thirty kilometres north to colonial authorities in Freetown. During her registration, Coray outlined the reasons for her escape, explaining that she chose to flee Mormodo Yoram because he unexpectedly sold her three children to another slave owner.<sup>4</sup> While the examples of Foday, Canray, and Gbanjah above alluded to severe physical abuse, Coray's entry presents an additional type of ill treatment: broken promises. Her master's choice to renege on an agreement to not sell her children represented an especially serious form of mistreatment and her prime motivation for absconding. After Coray's registration in January 1885, she was freed from slavery, with the Register indicating that she took up residence with Elizabeth Wilson of Fourah Bay Road in Freetown.<sup>5</sup> Whether she was ever able to reunite with her three children is left unknown.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1885-1894, p. 1. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with the following abbreviation: RES, 1885-1894.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Later, in May of 1886, an eleven-year-old Lokkoh-Temne boy named Tambah was registered in Freetown as an escaped slave.<sup>6</sup> His story illustrates some of the additional perils of enslavement, including exploitative labour practices, the ever-present threat of being resold to a new master, and the overall fragility of slave-master relationships. During May of 1886, Tambah was brought to Freetown by his master, Pa Kabbie, carrying rice to sell in Freetown markets. While in the city, Tambah and Pa Kabbie found themselves in a heated dispute with an unnamed local woman, who Tambah identified as their landlady in Freetown. The woman accused Pa Kabbie of stealing cloth from her. Kabbie categorically denied taking anything from the woman. However, Tambah was approached by the local woman and he promptly admitted that his master had indeed stolen the cloth. As punishment for this unexpected betrayal by his slave, Pa Kabbie threatened to sell Tambah when they returned to their residence in Port Lokkoh.<sup>7</sup> Faced with the uncertainties and potential dangers of life under a new master, Tambah fled Pa Kabbie and sought refuge with the colonial regime in the city. Tambah was liberated from slavery and was said to have taken up residence in the home of a Mrs. Eliza Williams of Clines Town, a neighbourhood in the northwest district of Freetown.<sup>8</sup>

These three sets of runaway slaves on their own reveal important elements about slavery in the Sierra Leone colony and its surrounding regions. For instance, together they reinforce the notion that the overall slave population in Sierra Leone was relatively diverse, consisting of Mende, Temne, Gallinhas, and Korankoh ethnic groups, to name only a few. The cases also reemphasize significant age and gender variations amongst the enslaved, from the presence of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

boys as young as eleven years old, like Tambah, to older individuals such as the relatively senior Damlay Coray. Beyond these and many other demographic trends, the three sets of runaways also provide evidence about very specific forms of mistreatment, hardship, and trauma endured by enslaved individuals.

First, the threat of re-sale weighed heavily over all sorts of enslaved people, including both men and women, and the young and old alike. Each of the above cases specifically reference or allude to a strong demand for slaves and the continued presence of slave trading in the regions of the colony. Damlay Coray suffered the heartbreaking sale of her three children to one or more new masters. The other cases then demonstrate the constant potential danger of being resold to a new and likely unfamiliar owner. The enslaved interpreted the threat of re-sale as a particularly egregious action by their owners, with many slaves consciously choosing the dangers of slave flight rather than waiting around to be resold. The experiences of the three runaways from Port Lokkoh, Foday, Camray, and Gbajanah, deliver a glimpse into the actual physical suffering of slaves, namely the agony of being forced into wooden or iron stocks for days on end. Finally, in addition to shedding more light on the role of slave labour in Freetown and the wider colony, Tambah's story reaffirms the threat of re-sale as ill treatment and underscores the punitive strategies and overall volatility of slave owners. From the perspectives of the enslaved themselves, these three sets of runaway slave entries alone document some of the real struggles, violence, and resilience that characterized enslaved life. This chapter specifically focuses on violence and mistreatment to find out what the institution of slavery was like for those who lived under it on a daily basis.

As shown by the accounts of the three runaways above, the Registers of Escaped Slaves can be used to better understand patterns of slave mistreatment. But identifying these patterns in

the Registers is a particularly daunting task because of the sheer volume of individual runaways who were mistreated by their masters and the litany of different actions that captives considered ill treatment. In order to effectively investigate this extensive and diverse collection of primary data, I will examine patterns and definitions of slave mistreatment across the next two chapters.

This current chapter aims to evaluate the spectrum of circumstantial and demographic factors that influenced threats of re-sale, which was by far the most epidemic form of slave abuse in the Registers. The next chapter builds upon the nature and consequences of threats of re-sale by focusing on other principal forms of slave mistreatment. It will concentrate on the following categories of abuse carried out by owners: food deprivation, extreme labour demands, forced confinement, corporal punishment, broken promises and issues related to pawnship. Both chapters are thus connected by the shared goal of uncovering and interpreting the specific and diverse range of slave mistreatment in Sierra Leone. They collectively strive to piece together and ultimately better understand the lived realities of slavery, from the very perspectives of the real people who survived the practice.

Using the untapped statistical and qualitative data from the Registers, both chapters offer entirely new perspectives on slavery in Sierra Leone.<sup>9</sup> They argue that slavery in late nineteenth

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<sup>9</sup> This chapter contributes to the rich and diverse body of scholarship on slavery and the history of Sierra Leone during the nineteenth century. For a sample of this historiography from just the last fifteen years, see the following: Philip Misevich, *Abolition and the Transformation of Atlantic Commerce in Southern Sierra Leone, 1790s to 1860s* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2019); Padraic X. Scanlan *Freedom's Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017); Philip Misevich, "The Mende and Sherbro Diaspora in Nineteenth Century Southern Sierra Leone," in Philip Misevich and Kristin Mann, eds., *The Rise and the Demise of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Atlantic World* (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2016); Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Bruce L. Mouser, "The Expulsion of Dalu Modu: A Muslim Trader in Anti-Slavery Freetown," in Alice Bellagambia, Martin Klein, and Sandra E. Greene, eds., *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 334-342; Richard Anderson, "The Diaspora of Sierra

century Sierra Leone was considerably harsher and more violent and coercive than its previous depictions in the existing historiography. In particular, historian John Grace, in his monograph studying British colonial policies towards slavery in the Sierra Leone Colony and later the Sierra Leone Protectorate, presents a number of challenging statements regarding the nature of slavery in this region and West Africa broadly. To describe enslaved life in nineteenth century West Africa, Grace contended that West African slaves lived safer and happier lives and that the life of a slave could be “described as reasonably comfortable and secure — in comparison to the lives of slaves elsewhere.”<sup>10</sup> Later, he emphasized the supposed benefits of enslaved status, noting that a slave’s master “could look after him” and that slaves were “not legally responsible for their actions.”<sup>11</sup> Mild, paternalistic benevolence was very clearly at the core of Grace’s characterization of slavery in Sierra Leone,<sup>12</sup> using much of the same descriptive language that colonial officials relied on to justify their own inaction against systems of slavery in Sierra Leone and elsewhere in colonial Africa.

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Leone’s Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and “Liberation” at Freetown, 1808-1863” *African Economic History*, Vol. 41 (2013), pp. 101-138; Schwarz, Suzanne, “Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans” *History in Africa*, 39 (2012), 175-207; Strickrodt, Silke, “African Girls’ Samplers from Mission Schools in Sierra Leone (1820’s to 1840’s),” *History in Africa*, 37 (2010), 189-245.

<sup>10</sup> John Grace, *Domestic Slavery in West Africa with a Particular Reference to the Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1896-1927* (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Grace’s view of slavery in Sierra Leone is reflective Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff’s thesis on African slavery as an institution of marginalization. They argued that Western conceptions of African slavery were unduly influenced by Westerners’ image and guilt of chattel slavery and the transatlantic trade. Continuing their argument, they famously characterized slavery as not the antithesis of freedom, but one institution on a continuum of many relationships of dependency. Slavery, in their view, was primarily a mechanism to incorporate slaves or outsiders into larger groups or households. Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, “African ‘Slavery’ as an Institution of Marginality,” in Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, eds., *Slavery and in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 4-5.

From the Registers of Escaped Slaves, which very likely only represented a fraction of the true influx of runaways into Freetown,<sup>13</sup> we are offered a markedly different picture of enslaved life and master-slave interactions in colonial Sierra Leone, one that was etched in the blood, tears, and resilience of ordinary slaves. As such, the chapters contend that the lives of slaves were shaped by violence and suffering, and the inherent vulnerability of their enslaved status. Captive human beings did not lead comfortable and secure lives in the colony and its hinterlands. They were severely mistreated, and they lived with the knowledge that they or their loved ones could be traded or sold off at a moment's notice. I also argue that not only were slaves ill treated, but the nature and categories of that mistreatment can be identified, quantified, and rigorously analyzed. In other words, the Registers reveal specific definitions of slave mistreatment and we can measure the prevalence and affects of these varying forms of ill treatment among the broader enslaved population in the region.

*Threats of Re-Sale as Mistreatment: Slave Trading and the Dangers of Re-Sale in Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone*

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<sup>13</sup> Colonial officials in Freetown lacked the manpower and the resources to officially register and track all the runaway slaves arriving in the city. Many fleeing slaves in fact did not register with the colonial government but remained in Freetown anyways. In 1889, for example, the number of fugitive slaves arriving in Freetown had reached a noticeable high point. This forced the Acting Colonial Administrator of Sierra Leone, Major Foster, to forward a portion of the Register of Escaped Slaves, 31 entries in total, to the Secretary of the Colonies in London. Foster included reports from other members of his administration, including James Parkes, Superintendent of the Native Affairs Department, who commented on the 31 cases of runaway slaves as “not a reliable guide in regard to the number of slaves who ran away from their masters to Freetown during the past six months.” He later stated that “as these slaves are not obliged to report themselves here except if they choose; [it's natural] that the majority of them do not do so; but fully one third of the labor population here may be said to consist of them.” The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/378, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, Enclosure No.1, Administrator Foster to The Right Honorable Lord Knutsford GCMG, August 22, 1889.

Of all the examples of harm inflicted upon slaves, the most significant form of ill treatment was undoubtedly the threat of re-sale. This type of mistreatment was founded upon an enslaved person's genuine belief that they would be resold to a new owner. This realization of their imminent re-sale often arose from a multitude of different circumstances. In many instances, runaways recounted being directly told by their masters that they were going to be sold to another slaveholder, with some former slaves even explaining the factors leading to this serious threat. Meanwhile, other enslaved individuals, through their own cunning and sometimes just blind luck, simply overheard their owners conversing about their plans to sell them. Just being within earshot of these hostile words was enough to warrant flight. And for many others, their owners' actions spoke louder than their words. They were not verbally threatened with re-sale, but they witnessed their owners' actions, such as the selling of other captives or travelling to areas with high concentrations of slavery, as enough proof that they were next in line to be sold.

The threat of re-sale is by far the most prevalent form of mistreatment reported in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, appearing as a reason for escape in 250 different cases between 1875 and 1894. Its overwhelming presence within the Remarks field of the Registers is on its own an indicator that the threat of re-sale was a distinct and especially pervasive category of ill treatment in this historical context, as it was elsewhere. The sheer volume of these cases is also evidence of a continued and consistent demand for slaves in Freetown and within the broader colony and its immediate vicinities. The existence of this ever-present slave traffic in the regions of Sierra Leone meant that the prospect of being resold loomed over the enslaved population and was accordingly perceived as a particularly grave form of slave mistreatment. In other words, since slave trading persisted in Sierra Leone, slaves interpreted the threat of re-sale as a clear and

present danger that could be easily carried out by their owners. In reaction to this type of ill treatment, slaves were quick to flee at the mere chance of being resold to a new owner or trafficked to undesirable or unknown area.

The prospect of being resold represented a sharp break in the master-slave relationship. As the Registers' narratives of flight demonstrate, enslaved people in the region of colonial Sierra Leone did not always accept their subjugated fates. Yet, many slaves were still able to reluctantly cope with the conditions of slavery by hoping to at least remain with one master, rather than be resold to one or more new owners. After long periods of loyal servitude, enslaved individuals could earn degrees of autonomy and broker agreements with their masters, both of which helped to maintain a co-existence between master and slave. Also, as we will explore later in this chapter, the threat of re-sale also jeopardized the unity of spouses, parents and children, and other family members. Overall, the potential of re-sale carried a stigma of uncertainty, vulnerability, and impending danger. Being sold off to a new owner could expose slaves to harsher labour regimens, increased physical violence, and other forms of trauma. The possibilities and imaged outcomes of re-sale were only limited by the fears of the enslaved.

The terror of being suddenly and irrevocably resold to an unfamiliar buyer or place was likely a product of the region's long history of slave trading. On the export side, the Sierra Leone River and its surrounding waterways and coastal areas were significant embarkation areas for slaves shipped to the Americas and elsewhere. During the era of the transatlantic slave trade, the slaving factory at Bunce Island, for example, was responsible for shipping an estimated 148,000 Africans between 1563 and 1808.<sup>14</sup> In his work on the history of the Upper Guinea Coast, which

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<sup>14</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, "Chapter 1: Sierra Leone in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" in Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition, and the Transition to*

encompassed the area of Sierra Leone, Walter Rodney described “the ferocity of the slave trade” as being instrumental in bringing local African populations down to waterways and estuaries to engage with European slave ships and commercial activity.<sup>15</sup> The enslavement and forced exile of thousands upon thousands of individuals from this region undoubtedly affected perceptions and fears of re-sale, among many other long-lasting effects.<sup>16</sup>

Even after Great Britain banned their subjects from participating in slave trading in 1807, local populations continued to be enslaved, trafficked, and resold around the Freetown Peninsula and the wider region. In his study on coastal slave trading, historian Allen Howard examined this development, stating the following:

After naval patrols terminated all Atlantic shipments in the 1850’s and 1860’s, coastal slaving continued because indigenous demand for enslaved people remained strong and perhaps even grew. Despite British efforts to stop the coastal trade, slavers were employing many of the same pathways and organizational patterns in the late 1800’s as their predecessors had in the Colony’s beginning days, modifying them as appropriate to evade detection.<sup>17</sup>

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*Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), p. 9. Anna Maria Falconbridge, whose husband worked the Sierra Leone Company, visited Bunce Island in the early 1790s. To describe the horrific state of the slaves held at Bunce Island’s slaving fort, she wrote the following passage: “Involuntarily I strolled to one of the windows a little before dinner, without the smallest suspicion of what I was to see.— judge then what my astonishment and feels were, at the sight of between two and three hundred victims, chained and parceled out in circles, just satisfying the cravings of nature from a tub of rice plated in the centre of each circle.” A.M. Falconbridge, *Narratives of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone, During the Years 179-1-2-3* (London: L.I. Higham, 1802), p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 80

<sup>16</sup> Anthropologist Rosalind Shaw correlates memories of the slave trade and ritual performs among Temne-speaking communities in contemporary Sierra Leone. Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Howard, “Nineteenth-Century Coastal Slave Trading,” p. 23-24.

Howard concluded that despite its repute as an anti-slavery colony, the colonial administrators of the Sierra Leone Colony “neither escaped the taint of slave trading nor mounted an all-out effort to stop it.”<sup>18</sup>

Philip Misevich added to this exploration of internal slave trading by also pointing out that slave owners and slave traders, with their captives in tow, regularly operated in Freetown, the wider colony, and its nearby regions.<sup>19</sup> In particular, slaves were driven from southern Sierra Leone to the peanut-producing regions north of Freetown. Slave merchants also re-routed the enslaved through Freetown itself, often for the purposes of selling off young slaves. Liberated African children were at the same time targeted for kidnappings, suppling more valuable bodies to this internal slaving network.<sup>20</sup> T.J. Alldridge, who served as colony’s Traveling Commissioner during the late nineteenth century, observed the purchase and trafficking of slaves in the hinterlands of the colony. He stated,

There was always a market for “mortals,” a term often applied to slaves...the professional slave-dealer from the surrounding country travelled to the slave-markets with his cattle, guns, gunpowder, and other greatly-prized articles, to barter for human beings, cash in those days being absolutely unknown. The price of slaves of course fluctuated according to the state of the country. I have known a man-slave offered for a bushel of husk rice, and I have seen a man, with a halter round his neck, led through the bush like a dog.<sup>21</sup>

Based on Alldridge’s account, along with the presence of slaving networks in Freetown, it is not surprising that fears of being trafficked and resold were entrenched in the minds of local slaves

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Misevich, “Chapter 10. Freetown and “Freedom?” Colonialism and Slavery in Sierra Leone, 1790s to 1861,” in Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition, and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), p. 198.

<sup>20</sup> Misevich, “Chapter 10. Freetown and “Freedom?””, p. 198, 201.

<sup>21</sup> T.J Alldridge, *A Transformed Colony. Sierra Leone: As It Was, As It Is, Its Progress, Peoples, Native Customs, and Undeveloped Wealth* (London: Seeley and Co., 1910), p. 280-281.

and other vulnerable or marginalized peoples.<sup>22</sup> In general, the prospect of re-sale was very much indicative of the innate vulnerability of enslaved people in the regions of colonial Sierra Leone and elsewhere in Africa. In the paragraphs and subsections below, we will examine the scores of runaway slaves from Sierra Leone who chose to flee when faced with threat of re-sale. For these individuals, the risks of flight and the dislocation of resettlement in Freetown outweighed the inherent fears and perceived dangers linked to re-sale.

But not all slaves were able to escape this cruel fate. A few individuals in the Registers reiterated that they had been sold and resold multiple times to different slave masters before running away to Freetown. A formerly enslaved teenager named Kehsoe conveyed precisely this to the colonial administration in Freetown in 1883. Kehsoe, a thirteen-year-old male of Temne-descent, was registered as an escaped slave on July 12, 1883.<sup>23</sup> He was originally enslaved near Port Lokkoh before his then master, Lamina Kong-ko, brought him southwest to Freetown to sell firewood. In the city, Kehsoe managed to escape and reported himself as an escaped slave with colonial authorities. During his registration, he emphasized the fact that he had been “constantly resold to different masters” and “takes advantage of remaining here for freedom.”<sup>24</sup> At the end of his Remarks entry, colonial scribes stated that he was to remain in Freetown with a Samuel S.

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<sup>22</sup> Historian Ismail Rashid’s chapter reaffirmed this commonly held fear of re-sale and slave traders in Northwestern Sierra Leone. In particular, he referenced an instance of two boys who were freed by a colonial policeman in 1893. As Rashid highlighted, one of the boys expressed unrestrained fear at the prospect of being taken to Susu country, pleading with the policeman to save them. Ismail Rashid, “Do Dady nor Lef me Make dem Carry me: Slave Resistance and Emancipation in Sierra Leone, 1894-1928,” in Suzanne Miers and Martin Klein, eds., *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), p. 208.

<sup>23</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 190.

Bowling of Priscilla Street in central Freetown, as per Kehsoe's own request.<sup>25</sup> While Kehsoe managed to successfully liberate himself, his experiences in slavery exemplify the uncertainty, vulnerability, and displacement that was lived by enslaved people in Sierra Leone. Moreover, his entry in the Register is evidence of the active and considerable demand for slaves, emphasizing that enslaved people were indeed valuable commodities and that they could be quickly sold and resold to different owners with relative ease.

Colonial officials were aware of these active slave trades in the region and even through the colony itself. But the government did very little to curtail slave trading, with some colonial officials even trivializing the insecurity of the enslaved. In 1893, for example, as the colonial government discussed the existence of the overland traffic in slaves, the Superintendent of the Native Affairs Department, J.C.E. Parkes minimized the implications of the slave trading to justify the British administration's nominal efforts to interfere with the practice of slavery. Writing to the Colonial Secretary, he reiterated his view that "so-called slavery" was benevolent in nature, and more importantly, that slaves lived relatively carefree lives, with "no thought for the morrow."<sup>26</sup> But Parkes' sentiments were not reflective of the true plight of enslaved people. Slaves were cognizant of the precariousness of their status. And the presence of active slave trades in Freetown and elsewhere increased their inherent vulnerability. The enslaved undoubtedly worried about what tomorrow would bring and as 250 cases in the Registers demonstrate, many lived with the anxiety and fear that they were about to be sold off to a new buyer.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The British National Archives, London, United Kingdom, CO 267/400, Sierra Leone Original Correspondence, J.C.E. Parkes to Colonial Secretary, January 9, 1893.

### *Threats of Re-Sale in the Escaped Slave Registers: Patterns, Prevalence, and Highlights*

In the first Register of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1884, re-sale appears a total of 154 times. Examining this data at two-year increments, for example, shows both the dramatic increases and significant dips in the frequency that these cases were reported. In 1875, seven runaways stated that they fled because they were susceptible to be resold. This figure sharply rose in 1877 and 1879, amounting to 22 and 28 cases respectively. The lowest number of reports in this sample was recorded for 1881, with only two subjects citing re-sale. Similarly, in 1883, there was again only three of these cases. Yet, in the following year, reports of owners threatening re-sale shot back up again, appearing a total of 39 times. In the second Register of Escaped Slaves, which contains reports for 1885 to 1894, runaway slaves fleeing from re-sale continued to stream into Freetown. In 1891, for example, the threat of being resold was cited as a motivation for running away in 51% of the total cases for that year. There are additional, albeit lower figures in the tally of registrations for 1887 and 1889, for example. Threats of re-sale appear in 25% of the total cases for 1887 and 33% for 1889. Although there is fluctuation in the rate at which the threat of re-sale appears over different years of the Registers, it never fully dissipated.

On the contrary, threats of re-sale were regularly reported and remained a distinctive form of ill treatment suffered by runaways over the entire twenty-year period of the Registers. Its preponderance suggests that it was a widespread method of ill treatment and likely a nearly universal feature of the enslaved experience in the regions of Sierra Leone in the late nineteenth century. The sweeping nature of this specific form of ill treatment is additionally reaffirmed by the categorical diversity of individuals it affected. The threat of re-sale was not limited to only

certain demographic segments of the enslaved population, nor to geographic locations. Instead, it was a threat uttered to slaves in nearly all corners of the colony and traversed various age, gender, and ethnic lines. The prospect of being re-sold, as expressed by the hundreds of individuals in the Registers, was evidently woven into the very fabric of enslaved life, as it was elsewhere in colonial West Africa. Its prevalence as an especially threatening type of mistreatment conveys the fragility and vulnerability of enslaved lives in Sierra Leone, offering an alternate perspective on the nature of African slavery during the colonial period.

The threat of re-sale occupies a nearly overwhelming presence within the Remarks column of the Registers of Escaped Slaves. At first glance, references to re-sale could be perceived as ambiguous and vague, especially in terms of revealing the unique circumstances of enslaved life. After all, the phrases “escaped because he was to be sold” or “escaped because his master wishes to sell him” say very little about the on the ground, daily conditions of slavery, other than signaling that slaves could be sold off to different owners. On the surface, these cases bare a striking resemblance to the vague, formulaic, and more commonly used explanation for flight: “escaped on account of ill treatment.” However, these parallels dissipate upon closer examination of the cases pertaining to re-sale. A significant portion of re-sale cases in fact contain detailed and unique explanations on the provenance and circumstances surrounding the threat and flight of slaves. Simply put, many of the cases dealing with re-sale offer descriptions of how and why certain slaves and groups of slaves were threatened with re-sale.

By reconstructing dozens of these cases, the following subsections outline the major situational and demographic factors that influenced threats of re-sale, underscoring the fundamental insecurity of slave status and the unbridled power masters held over their human property. In particular, the subsections retrace how threats of re-sale were used strategically by

masters to punish and deter disobedient captives. They also concentrate on additional circumstances and experiences that shaped slaves' interpretations of and responses to threats of re-sale, such as witnessing the sale of other captives or the identities and reputations of their would-be buyers. The final subsection spotlights the experiences of one of the Registers most distinctive demographic groups affected by re-sale: formerly enslaved families. It uncovers the presence of captives who were bonded to each other by parentage, marriage, or other relations, and interprets how enslaved kin struggled to maintain the unity of their families under the threat of re-sale.

*Disciplining Wayward Captives: The Threat of Re-Sale as Punishment*

This sub-sample of entries documenting the threat of re-sale contains a multitude of different patterns and characteristics. These features can be used to explore the diverse experiences, challenges, and hardships that shaped the lives of ordinary slaves in Sierra Leone. Appearing in a small handful of individual cases are descriptions of owners specifically using the threat of re-sale to discipline wayward slaves. The most descriptive case that demonstrates this punitive nature of re-sale is found in the entry of eleven-year-old Tambah, whose story was briefly explored in the opening of this chapter. After a dispute over a stolen piece of cloth, the young slave's former master, Pa Kabbie, threatened to sell him to another owner when they returned home to Port Lokkoh. In response, Tambah reported himself to colonial authorities and was registered as a runaway slave on May 26, 1886.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> RES, 1884-1894, p. 27-28.

Although Tambah successfully self-liberated and began a new life in Freetown, the account of his conflict with Pa Kabbie underscores the threat of re-sale as a punitive strategy to discipline the enslaved. First, Pa Kabbie's threat of re-sale was a clear punishment for Tambah's perceived disloyalty in revealing the truth about the stolen cloth. This slave owner likely viewed this betrayal as an unreconcilable offense that warranted re-sale, if anything to just rid himself of an especially defiant slave. Second, Pa Kabbie's threat of re-sale would also have impacted other slaves he may have owned. The power of re-sale demonstrated the nearly absolute authority owners wielded over the lives of their slaves. In Pa Kabbie's case, his determination to sell Tambah for disobedient behaviour served as a preventative measure to ensure the continued compliance of his other slaves. Insubordinate captives, as he demonstrated, could expect to be resold as punishment for their misdeeds. Lastly, Pa Kabbie's quick decision to sell off Tambah, along with Tambah's immediate response to flee, emphasizes the existential danger posed by internal slave trades in the region. Their actions highlight the accessibility of active slave markets and the high demand for slaves within the colony, and thus reaffirms slaves' justified fears of being easily sold off by their owners. These factors likely attributed to the sheer volume of re-sale cases reported in the Registers of Escaped Slaves. The prospect of being resold to a new owner was undoubtedly a real and prevalent influence the lives of the enslaved, especially for those who tried to undermine their owners.

In Tambah's case, publicly outing your master as a thief in Freetown likely represented a brazen act of disloyalty, necessitating the retaliatory punishment of re-sale. However, retributive re-sale was not always just a consequence of a major discord between masters and their slaves. The Registers of Escaped Slaves contains considerable evidence on the wide range of unruly behaviour that appeared to warrant the threat of re-sale from slave owners. In particular, there are

entries of runaways who were threatened with re-sale after seemingly minor offenses against their owners. This weaponization of re-sale by owners for even the slightest of transgressions is exemplified by the experiences of Sambah Camerah, who reported himself as an escaped slave on December 23, 1888.<sup>28</sup> Sambah was a twenty-five-year old Lokkoh man who had been enslaved in a village on the Bullom Shore, just across the Sierra Leone River from Freetown. During his registration with colonial authorities, Sambah expressed his reasons for fleeing his former owner, a man named Ceray Lahai. According to his account, Lahai threatened to resell him after catching him speaking with an unnamed woman, which appeared to be strictly forbidden.<sup>29</sup> For Sambah, his defiance was not explicitly violent, nor did he reveal his master's misdeeds, like Tambah before him. Instead, it was the simple act of speaking to another person that triggered Lahai's wrath. Moreover, the threat of re-sale, in the mind of Sambah, was a genuine and immediate danger to his well-being, as demonstrated by his immediate flight to Freetown after hearing it.

His story once again stresses the general fragility of enslaved existence, namely the reality that minor transgressions against owners carried potentially life-altering consequences. Furthermore, Sambah's account is a poignant reminder of the strict power owners wielded over the everyday lives of their slaves, such as restricting and controlling their ordinary interactions with other people. The possibility of being resold was symptomatic of the enslaved condition in Sierra Leone, just as it was in other slave systems in colonial Africa and beyond. Tambah and Sambah's experiences bring needed clarity to some of the circumstantial parameters, strategic uses, and human consequences tied to the threat of re-sale. The retelling of their stories reveals

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

the potentially wide array of offenses that triggered threats of re-sale, emphasizing the overall precariousness of slavery in this context. Owners evidently possessed the authority and means to easily engage sell off their human property. They used this power to maintain considerable control over the daily lives of their captives and quell any form of unwanted behaviour. These two examples within the Registers' larger collection of re-sale cases provide compelling evidence on the threat or possibility of re-sale as a punitive measure used against wayward slaves. Without a doubt, many captives were suddenly and unexpectedly sold off to new owners as punishment for any and all types of transgressions. But some enslaved individuals found ways to physically escape this cruel punishment. In these instances, the uncertainty of displacement and the dangers of a new owner were interpreted by slaves as a particularly severe and irreversible form of slave mistreatment. These factors thus constituted a prime impetus to self-liberate.

*First-Hand Accounts of Re-Sale: Slave Flight and the Sale of Fellow Captives*

The terror associated with threats of re-sale was also amplified by the personal experiences of captives. Several runaways who were threatened with re-sale also stated that they observed the sale of other slaves. In these cases, the threat of re-sale carried more weight and triggered slaves to desert their owners before they themselves would be sold off. Accounts of runaways witnessing the sale of their fellow captives are prominent in the Remarks fields of six subjects who arrived in Freetown during August 1879.<sup>30</sup> Ethnically, they comprised of five Temne people and a single individual of Limba-descent. All six fled from the same owner: a

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<sup>30</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 74.

Fula man named Doorah. Of the Temne runaways, there was a twenty-five-year-old man named Sorie Bannah, a twenty-two-year-old man Kehrusehoh, a seventeen-year-old girl named Yain Rain Kyo, and a woman, thirty-year old Darmoh Lenniah and her four-year-old son, Masah Bangooru. The lone Limba was Foday Camarah, a thirty-five-year-old man.<sup>31</sup> They all were previously enslaved by Dorrah in the area of Mapilla, a small village south of the Little Scarcies River and approximately fifty kilometers from Freetown. They arrived in Freetown together and recounted their story of escape to colonial authorities.

According to their entries, they fled their master Dorrah in Mapilla after he mistreated and threatened to re-sell them. They must have fled southwards on foot until making it to the banks of the Sierra Leone River, where they boarded a canoe and landed on Tasso Island. They stayed on Tasso until four o'clock in the afternoon on August 20<sup>th</sup> before a local resident named Mr. Thorpe brought them across the river to Freetown, where they were all registered as fugitive slaves with Sierra Leone colonial government.<sup>32</sup> They delivered a clear and detailed explanation for their collective escape from Dorrah's confines in Mapilla. The six former slaves declared that they were ill treated and subsequently threatened with re-sale. Furthermore, before they were threatened, they had observed Dorrah selling off his other slaves to local slavers in the region.<sup>33</sup> These entries, depicting the harrowing flight of six enslaved individuals, including a mother and her son, are evidence of how the fear of re-sale could be amplified by additional circumstantial factors.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

These former slaves reiterated to colonial authorities that they were ill treated and threatened with re-sale. And even though re-sale was an intrinsic element of the enslaved condition in Sierra Leone, the experiences of these runaways highlight how the threat of re-sale intersected with certain personal experiences and situational contexts. In this case, the threat of re-sale, as a distinct category of mistreatment, took on more weight and validity because the master had just sold some of his other slaves to other local owners or slave traders. This master's actions conveyed his willingness and resolve to sell off his human property. For the six runaways, it was a certain sign that they too could be resold. Upon realizing the gravity of the situation, they immediately fled towards Freetown.<sup>34</sup> Their shared experiences illustrate the correlation between interpretations of re-sale by the enslaved and circumstantial factors, such as witnessing the sale of fellow captives.

*“Threatened to be sold to the Soosooos”: Flight, Re-Sale, and the Identities of Slave Buyers*

Reactions to re-sale were not only shaped by the terror of seeing others sold first-hand. Slaves' perceptions of re-sale were likewise contingent on the identity and location of their potential new owners or buyers. In simpler terms, in the minds of the enslaved, threats of re-sale were met with increased fear based on who and where they were to be trafficked to. This unique feature of cases dealing with re-sale is alluded to in the above narrative of the six slaves from Mapilla. They recounted seeing their fellow bondspeople sold off to new owners, but they also identified their potential new proprietors as from or operating in Bonkolenken and Fula countries. Their foreknowledge of who they would be sold to, coupled the sale of their fellow

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

slaves, created the precise circumstances that, in their minds, necessitated flight. When fielding questions concerning their motivations for fleeing, the six did not hesitate to identify their would-be buyers, confirming the real fear associated with Fula masters and slave traders. In the 250 re-sale cases, slave buyers of Fula descent are explicitly referenced in nine individual cases. Susu owners are similarly mentioned in three separate cases, appearing as another feared ethnic group by slaves and former slaves alike.

The Fula and Susu's reputation as fearsome slavers had certainly preceded them. And yet, their reputations were indeed grounded in historical precedent. From the early years of the Sierra Leone Colony, even before it gained Crown Colony status in 1807, the region was economically, socially, and politically influenced by the presence of the Muslim Fula empire of Futa Jallon, located north of Freetown in what is now present-day Guinea. During the era of the Atlantic slave trade, a sharp rise in slave departures occurred in the region "after the militant Islamic forces of the Fuuta Jalon highlands, pursuing a *jihad*, sold slaves to finance wars and to found and consolidate their state."<sup>35</sup> In historian Padraic Scanlan's monograph on the early decades of British Sierra Leone, he describes the Fula as major drivers of trans-Saharan and coastal trade and the nascent colony's most coveted trading partners.<sup>36</sup> As both prominent slave and gold traders, the Fula regularly brought gold into the colony, which was sometimes carried on the wrists of their slaves.<sup>37</sup> The presence of Fula traders, particularly slave traders, continued

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<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Morgan, "Chapter 2. Liverpool Ascendant: British Merchants and the Slave Trade on the Upper Guinea Coast, 1701-1808," in Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition, and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, p. 18; For a more comprehensive history of the Muslim Fula in Sierra Leone, see Alusine Jalloh, *African Entrepreneurship: Muslim Fula Merchants in Sierra Leone* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, p. 34

throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1890's, Fula merchants typically used cattle to sell and barter for captives within Freetown itself, sometimes garnering the ire of Sierra Leone's colonial administrations.<sup>38</sup>

While the Fula dominated the highlands to the north, the Susu, along with several other ethnic groups, controlled parts of the Atlantic coastline, within the vicinity of the Sierra Leone Colony.<sup>39</sup> In the 1850s, for example, Susu slavers gained the attention of the colonial government when a young formerly enslaved boy, who resided in Freetown for many years, described being trafficked out of the colony by Susu slavers.<sup>40</sup> And in the 1890's, the Susu continued to play a prominent role in conveying slaves out of the colony. For instance, Rashid documented a pair of young male slaves during this period who desperately sought out colonial agents as they were being taken into Susu country, fearing that they would never be able to return to the colony or their homelands.<sup>41</sup> Howard rightly described the landscape of slave trafficking in the nineteenth century by stating, "People labeled as 'Susu', 'Mandingo', and 'Fula' most commonly were reported as slave dealers."<sup>42</sup> While Susu, Mandingo, and Fula slave traders operated near the Sierra Leone Peninsula, they were traditionally based in powerful societies far north of the colony such as Moriah and Futa Jallon.<sup>43</sup> Moriah, in particular, was a

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<sup>38</sup> Howard, "Nineteenth-Century Coastal Slave Trading," p. 39-40.

<sup>39</sup> Ismail Rashid, "Escape, Revolt, and Marronage in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone Hinterland," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34 (2000), p. 662.

<sup>40</sup> Misevich, "Chapter 10. Freetown and "Freedom?," 201.

<sup>41</sup> Rashid, "'Do Dady nor Lef me," p. 208.

<sup>42</sup> Howard, "Nineteenth-Century Coastal Slave Trading," p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Rashid, "'Do Dady nor Lef me," p. 209, 211.

major center of rice cultivation.<sup>44</sup> As Rashid also emphasized, the Susu, Mandingo, and Fula's use of plantation slave labour tended to be more extensive" than the region's other ethnic groups.<sup>45</sup> These factors likely contributed to slaves' perceptions of these groups as fearsome slave owners.

It is of little surprise that the fear of being conveyed to Fula territory, or bought by Fula slavers, appears as a key component in the accounts told by some of the runaways in the Register. The earliest reference to Fula country in cases dealing with re-sale appears on October 30, 1878.<sup>46</sup> Two Temne men, forty-year-old Robin Mailah and eighteen-year-old Syoe, arrived in Freetown from the village of Madina on the Bullom Shore. Given the close proximity of Madina to Freetown, the two must have walked a few kilometers, boarded a canoe, and crossed the Sierra Leone River to the shores of the city. They subsequently reported themselves as escaped slaves to the colonial government and identified their owner as a person known as Bainbah. Their remarks field contains the following, "made their escape to the Settlement for freedom from a threat of being taken to Fulah Country to be resold."<sup>47</sup> After their registration, colonial authorities noted only that the two runaways relocated to an unspecified part of Freetown.<sup>48</sup> This account of their experience shows that the anxieties linked to re-sale were significantly amplified if the slaves' potential buyers were associated with the Fula. In the life trajectories of Robin Mailah and Syoe, the possibility of being trafficked into Fula territory

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<sup>44</sup> Historian Ismail Rashid connected the precolonial history of enslaved labour, rice production, and slave revolts in eighteenth century Moriah in "Escape, Revolt, and Marronage."

<sup>45</sup> Rashid, "Do Dady nor Lef me," p. 211.

<sup>46</sup> RES, 1875-1884., p. 62.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

proved to be an intolerable fate, forcing both to urgently flee Bainbah in Madina, as well as openly retell their stories and experiences to colonial officials in Freetown.

This sentiment is also conveyed in one of the most detailed and drawn out cases in the Register, one of a very few entries that concentrates on the pawning of children in colonial Sierra Leone.<sup>49</sup> On 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1885, a twelve-year-old Temne girl named Sebbah was registered as an escaped slave.<sup>50</sup> She was originally pledged by an uncle and subsequently sold to a man named Mamadu Fula. As his newly acquired property, Sebbah believed she would surely be taken deep inland to Fula territory. Her fears quickly turned to reality as she soon found herself on a canoe travelling with her master's people. Bad tides, however, proved to be Sebbah's saving grace. Mamadu and his men were forced to make landfall on Tasso Island, located in the Sierra Leone River to await more favourable conditions. Acting swiftly, the young girl made the most of this opportune moment. She fled the clutches of her captors and concealed herself in the island's undergrowth. Sebbah remained hidden as her master's people searched for her. Before long, she was uncovered in the bush by a local resident and taken to Mr. Foresythe, a British official stationed in the area. Foresythe order Sebbah to be accompanied to Freetown to avoid re-enslavement and to be officially liberated from slavery.<sup>51</sup>

After arriving in Freetown and while being registered as an escaped slave in the city, Sebbah was again blessed with another timely opportunity. As luck would have it, she encountered one of her relatives, Abdul Lahai Kalloho, at the Government Interpreter House.

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<sup>49</sup> We will revisit the story of young Sebbah in the next chapter, which focuses in part on the pawning of children in late nineteenth century Sierra Leone.

<sup>50</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

Under his care, young Sebbah wished to begin her journey back home to her mother and her people.<sup>52</sup> This story of an especially brave twelve-year-old girl, on one hand, encapsulates the resilience of enslaved individuals, even young children, and the extent at which they tried to avoid enslavement in Fula territory or by Fulas themselves. Sebbah flatly declared to colonial authorities that “she was pledged by an uncle of hers and afterwards sold to a Foulah man named Momodoo Foulah who brought her down with the view of taking her to Foulah country.”<sup>53</sup> While Sebbah’s narrative concentrates on pawning and the fallout of re-sale, it nonetheless highlights widely held fears of being resold into Fula territory, as Sebbah flatly expressed. As she found herself taken as a captive, her belief that she would be carried deep into Fula country pushed her to frantic efforts to escape. Her fears reflected those of countless other slaves during this period and another example of the contextual parameters of threats of re-sale, especially regarding how this form of mistreatment was interpreted in the minds of enslaved people in the region of the colony.

In addition to Fulas, the Susus were also identified as an ethnicity of owners that slaves tried to avoid at all costs. Threats of re-sale seemed to hold more weight with the enslaved when their potential new owners were Susu or resided in Susu territory. Two examples from the Register offer more insight into this correlation between the ethnicity or residence of buyers and a slave’s conscious choice to flee. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1875, two adult Temne men arrived in Freetown and were registered as escaped slaves with colonial authorities.<sup>54</sup> Karee, the first entry, was thirty-five-years old and Cain Dainah, his companion, was listed as forty years old. In the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 6.

transcriptions explaining their motivations for self-liberating, scribes recorded this passage: “Escaped to this settlement for Freedom for being threatened to be sold to the Soosoo, formerly slaves to the late King of Quiah, Bey Chantah, and had been sold by Bo Karay Bomboly to Ansumana, a Soosoo, from whom they made their escape. Arrived here on the 7<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>55</sup> This explanation, like the runaways who fled from Fula slavers, foregrounds the interplay of circumstantial factors, such as the ethnicity of potential owners, and slaves’ decision to self-emancipate. Their recount of the details of their escape also provide additional and unique information, some of which was typically not present in other cases of re-sale or even across the entire Registers. This exceptional information is the fact that Karee and Cain Dainah both referenced being held or sold by at least three previous masters, the former King of Quiah, Bey Chantah, Bo Karay Bomboly, and finally, Ansumana.<sup>56</sup>

This piece of unique information from their dialogue with colonial officials can be interpreted in several different ways, especially in relation to their final decision to escape. In one way, for example, the two runaways might not have had the will, opportunity, or sheer good fortune to escape when they were repeatedly resold to new owners. But opportunity seemed to present itself rather quickly after they realized Ansumana, a Susu himself, intended to resell them to other Susu slavers. It may have been blind luck in this specific instance, but it was equally likely that Karee and Cain Dainah chose to escape at this particular moment because of the heightened fear of being trafficked by Susu slavers, even after being resold to multiple slave owners in the past. These entries in the Register support the notion that the severity of threats of re-sale were at least in some cases dependent on the identity, ethnicity, and location of the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

prospective slave buyers. As demonstrated, slaves were especially fearful and resistant to the possibility of being trafficked to Fula and Susu owners. By illuminating the circumstantial factors that shaped the reactions to threats of re-sale, these sorts of cases contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the connection between slaves' interpretations of mistreatment and their decisions to abscond their owners.

### *The Threat of Re-Sale and Maintaining Family Unity Under Slavery*

Exploring additional circumstances and demographic patterns provides more insights into how captives or groups of captives interpreted threats of re-sale from their owners. One of the most distinctive demographic segments in the 250 entries dealing with re-sale, and in all 1152 cases in the Registers, is the existence of family relationships among individual and groups of runaway slaves. Marital, parental, and other familial bonds between the Registers' subjects are representative of the considerable presence of families within the wider enslaved population. While owners held considerable and often unrestrained power over their human property, enslaved people still found ways to exercise personal agency in shaping their lives under enslavement. Some captives actively chose to form marriages and create families with other bondspeople. As it was in systems of slavery elsewhere, these relationships were often tolerated because family bonds tended to keep an enslaved person more closely tied to their master, who usually also owned the slave's spouse and/or children. Therefore, for slave owners, these family ties amongst the enslaved could also be used to quell potential disobedience, particularly by threatening to harm or sell off a member of slave's family. However, for the enslaved, their relationships to their spouses, children and other family members carried a much more significant meaning. Families were defining components of a slave's subjugated life and many

slaves negotiated and fought to maintain these personal relationships. And when masters threatened the unity these family units, slaves saw it as a particularly grave injustice, and many chose to flee with their families in tow.

There are at least 57 formerly enslaved families listed in the Registers of Escaped Slaves. As they were processed and registered as runaways in the colony, subjects were either asked or openly declared their familial relationships. Colonial scribes usually added an extra note in the Remarks column of these individuals, stating the nature of their relationship to another subject. Escaped slave entries were always numbered, based on the order in which subjects were registered. Therefore, in the government's effort to record and identify enslaved families, scribes concluded Remarks entries with short statements like "Wife of #102", "Husband of #103", or "Son of #102 and #103." These cases of runaway families mostly consisted of either one parent and a child, or a husband and wife. However, larger family units, including both parents and multiple children, are recurrent throughout the Registers. The rarest relationship in these 57 sets of families is one instance of an aunt fleeing with her nephew and another documenting the flight of grandmother with her grandchild.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, there are notes identifying enslaved families in nearly all years of the Registers, indicating that families of fugitive slaves frequently reported themselves to the colonial government in Freetown. The most significant arrival of enslaved families, for example, occurred in 1884, consisting of at least thirteen distinct sets of subjects who were related by blood, marriage, or other kinship.

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<sup>57</sup> Mamusoo Conteh was registered along with her granddaughter, Bartoe, on December 11, 1883. Both subjects arrived in Freetown with six others, all of whom had been previously held in slavery by Adamah Bangoorah at a factory on Matakong Island, just off the coast of French Guinea. In August 1884, as part of a mass arrival of twenty-nine escaped slaves from Port Lokkoh, Monday Benkeh was listed as the aunt of a ten-year-old boy named Cabby Marica. We will examine their account in greater detail later in this subsection. RES, 1875-1884, p. 201-202, 223-226.

A significant portion of runaways who fled with family members had specifically absconded because of the threat of re-sale. This threat appears in the Remarks column of 23 of the 57 sets of family-related cases in the Registers. This means that just under half the families who fled slavery in Sierra Leone had done so because one or more family members were about to be sold off to new buyers or slave traders.<sup>58</sup> By exploring some of these 23 sets of cases, this section sheds light on the experiences, challenges, and different paths enslaved families took to keep their loved ones together. They document the identities of enslaved family members, including the specific nature of their kinship to one another, while also underscoring how the threat of re-sale influenced their life trajectories. These accounts also allow us to analyze and speculate on the ways in which enslaved kin, especially parents of young children, offered support to their loved ones as they braved the displacement of slave flight.

The following case studies highlight two principal strategies utilized by enslaved families to self-liberate in Freetown. First, some family units simply fled by themselves, travelling only with their kin. This typically involved an entire family absconding on their own, which was typically a husband, wife, and one or more of kids. Second, captive families also attached themselves to larger exoduses of wayward slaves, usually in pairs, such as a husband and wife or

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<sup>58</sup> The remaining 24 families in the Registers often just cited a variant of “escaped on account of ill treatment” as their prime reason for flight. For example, on July 8, 1885, six runaways were formally registered in Freetown. They had been enslaved in the village of Medina on the Bullom Shore, just north from the city, across the Sierra Leone River. According to their Remarks field, the six had suffered an unspecified form of ill treatment at the hands of their former owner, Mormoh Gabbee. As officials processed and recorded their accounts and personal information, it was revealed that all six were related to each other. Forty-five-year-old Momodoo Lamina and thirty-year-old Boye Menny were listed as the father and mother of the following four children: Lansannah, a twelve-year-old boy, Oomaro, a nine-year-old boy, and two little girls, Daymoh, six years old, and Latmattah, two and half years old. In terms of their resettlement in Freetown, Momodoo Lamina and Boye Menny planned to work or establish a farm in the colony. RES, 1885-1894, p. 9-10.

a single parent and child. In rarer cases, entire families fled within these larger groups of fugitive slaves. By reconstructing and interpreting these two distinct pathways of self-liberation, we will be able to gain deeper insight into the varying responses of enslaved kin who were threatened with re-sale.

A prominent example of an entire family fleeing on their own comes in September of 1891.<sup>59</sup> During their registration with the colonial government, this family disclosed that they ran away precisely because their former master, Ila Binty, threatened to sell them off to another owner. Ila Binty previously held them in the northern town of Kambia on the Great Scarcies River, near the present-day border of the modern republics Sierra Leone and Guinea.<sup>60</sup> There is no indication of the exact route these runaways took on their escape to Freetown. Given that the town of Kambia was situated on the shores of the Great Scarcies, this family probably travelled by canoe down the river and south along the Atlantic coastline of the Bullom Shore, before arriving in the city. They also could have travelled southwards on foot from Kambia, likely crossing the Sierra Leone River to Freetown from the port village of Pepel. Their entries in the Register outlined the composition of their family, which consisted of two parents and a total of five children. They were all recorded as Susu. A thirty-six-year-old male named Baraka and Dehmoh, a thirty-two-year-old woman, were explicitly cited as the parents of the five children listed below them. Their daughters were Connah, Kye, and Konney, and they were recorded as fourteen, eight, and six years old respectively. The last two entries were Baraka and Dehmoh's younger sons, four-year-old Foray and eighteenth month old Fasenneh.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 101-102.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

But enslaved families under the threat of re-sale did not always escape on their own. In fact, the majority of the 23 sets of families who absconded due to re-sale were part of larger groups of fleeing captives. This pattern of flight from re-sale is mostly clearly illustrated in the entries documenting the arrival of twenty-nine runaways in Freetown in August 1884.<sup>62</sup> These twenty-nine cases were one of the largest single exoduses of slaves across both Registers of Escaped Slaves. All twenty-nine captives were formerly the property of one owner, Santiggy Nonkoh Lahai,<sup>63</sup> providing a prominent example of large-scale slaveholding operations in Sierra Leone and its nearby hinterlands. All twenty-nine runaways were formally freed on August 14, 1884. During their intake with the colonial government, they revealed their identities and other personal information, as well as their former place of enslavement in Port Lokkoh.<sup>64</sup> They had presumably travelled southwest on land or via the region's riverways, before arriving together in Freetown. When asked about their motivations for liberating themselves, all twenty-nine runaways explained that they had absconded because they too feared that they would be sold by their former master.<sup>65</sup>

This large cluster of runaways varied demographically, representing numerous segments of the overall enslaved population. Individuals identified as part of six different ethnic groups, including, for instance, Temne, Lokkoh, Susu, and Sangarah. Four subjects were also listed as infants under two-years old and another four came in above the age of thirty-five, indicating a relatively wide age range. There was also a considerable presence of female captives within the

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<sup>62</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 223-226.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 224, 226.

group. A total of 20 of the 29 runaways were recorded as female by colonial scribes and thus made-up approximately 69% of the subjects. However, the most striking characteristic of this large group was that most of these twenty-nine runaways was that most subjects were related to one another. There were precisely seven identifiable family units in these entries, making it the largest single grouping of enslaved families found in both Registers of Escaped Slaves.<sup>66</sup>

Monday Benkeh, a thirty-five-year-old Temne woman identified ten-year-old Cabby Marica as her young nephew and twelve year old Fairah Locco as her daughter.<sup>67</sup> Next, Famaray Wanneh, who was forty years old, was noted as the mother of the slave recorded after her, a twelve-year boy named Lamoorah Lokkoh.<sup>68</sup> Daymoh Yegbeh, the subsequent entry in the Register, was an adult Lokkoh woman, who evidently had arrived in Freetown carrying her two small daughters. Her eldest was Quiah Lokkoh, four years old, her younger daughter was listed as a small infant named Rukoh.<sup>69</sup> Damoh Bah, a Lokkoh woman, was then identified as the

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<sup>66</sup> These large migrations of bondspeople from single owners appear sporadically throughout both Registers of Escaped Slaves. For example, in March 1891, there was a similar, albeit slightly smaller dataset of runaway slaves arriving from Benty in French Guinea. After reporting themselves to colonial authorities, a total of nineteen slaves were registered and formally freed by the Sierra Leone government on March 23, 1891. They each identified a man named Ansu as their former master. Like Santiggy Nonkoh Lahai, Ansu had threatened all of them with re-sale. This caused the sizeable exodus of nineteen captives from Ansu's confines in Benty. During their intake with colonial officials in Freetown, it was revealed, just as it was in the cases of Lahai's former slaves, that some of the runaways were related to each other. Within the dataset of nineteen runaways, there were two sets of family units, encompassing five individual subjects. Barlay, a thirty-four-year-old Lokkoh woman, was married to a fifty-four-year-old man called Pori Lokkoh. Additional notes in their Remarks field revealed a multi-partnered marriage, with both Koolakoh and Femgbeh listed as the wives of fifty-five-year-old Temne named Porie Ceasay. Their appearance in the Registers also emphasize the existence of family bonds within the general enslaved population in Sierra Leone, as well as how those bonded slaves reacted to the threat of re-sale from their master. Their example also illustrates how enslaved families, and especially married captives, fled to Freetown as part of larger groups of runaways. RES, 1885-1894, p. 97-100.

<sup>67</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 223, 225.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

mother of the subject entered directly after her, an eighteen-month-old infant known as Sonkary.<sup>70</sup> The next listing in this dataset of 29 runaways features an entire family of former slaves. Adults Foray Bannah and Damoh Yellie were recorded as the parents of two daughters, four-year-old Sattiah Cabby and infant Daymoh Digbah, as well as a five-year old boy named Yainy Locco.<sup>71</sup> Immediately after the entries for the above family, a woman named Damoh Dankah was specified as the mother of a six-year-old girl named Dorah Leekeh.<sup>72</sup> The last identifiable family unit among this large exodus of former slaves from Port Lokkoh was a mother and her two very young children. Daymah Yegbeh II, a nineteen-year-old Temne woman, was marked as the mother of an infant called Sattiah and a five-year-old girl named Pongah.<sup>73</sup> Of the 29 captives who fled slave master Santiggy Nonkoh Lahai, a total of 20 people absconded with at least one or more of their relatives. At least two complete families appear in this dataset, as do numerous instances of a single parent arriving with one or more kids. And these kin groups were not only comprised of immediate family members, as the runaway Monday Benkeh demonstrated by fleeing enslavement with her nephew.

The presence of families among other groups of escaped slaves was a recurrent pattern in the Registers, especially for subjects threatened with re-sale. In February 1889, for example, and less than four years after the exodus of slaves from Santiggy Nonkon Lahai's residence in Port Lokkoh, a group of four runaways reported themselves as escaped slaves to the British

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 225.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

administration in Freetown.<sup>74</sup> According to their entries on February 23, 1889, all four had been held in a village in the northern area of the Bullom Shore. Sankongie, a twenty-year-old Susu woman, and two small children, Foray and Wochai, were the captives of a slaved owner called Lantiggy Mormor. The other member of this group, Boteh, was a twenty-two-year-old Temne man, and his slave master was listed as Narfigy, a Fula man. These two slave masters, for unspecified reasons, had threatened all four subjects with re-sale, which triggered their collective escape to colonial authorities across the Sierra Leone River.<sup>75</sup> During their intake with colonial officials, Boteh and Sankongie revealed that they were husband and wife, despite being enslaved by two different owners from the same village.<sup>76</sup> On one hand, the fear of re-sale might have made them immediately seek each other out before escaping. But, on the other hand, it was more likely that they coordinated their flight, especially since they were owned by different masters and they were fleeing with children. While they arrived in Freetown together, Foray and Wochai, were not officially recorded as Sankongie and Boteh's the kids. However, the children were not placed in the home of a Freetown resident or family,<sup>77</sup> which was the typical procedure for unaccompanied minors. While it is not stated definitively, the children very likely remained in the care of Sankongie and Boteh, evidencing the presence of improvised, non-biological family structures among the captive population.

Each of the accounts above illustrate how enslaved families interpreted and responded to threats of re-sale, shedding light on the life-altering consequences of this form of ill treatment.

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<sup>74</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 77-78.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

Their testimonials and subsequent entries in the Registers are significant for a multitude of specific reasons. First, just from their appearance in these larger logbooks of former captives, the case studies revealed the individual identities, experiences, and variations of family units that were part of the greater enslaved population in Sierra Leone. Slaveholders owned captives who were related by blood and marriage, including spouses, parents and their children, and other extended kin, like aunts and grandparents. Powerful slave owners, such as Santiggy Nonkoh Lahai, were shown to hold multiple sets of entire families. The presence of these enslaved kin groups in the Registers, at the very least, brings attention to the significance of familial connections in shaping the lives and decisions of bondspeople. Not only did subjects desert their owners with their loved ones in tow, they freely declared the nature of their relationships to the colonial government and resettled in Freetown together.

Secondly, when families were who were threatened to be torn apart by re-sale, they took specific actions to maintain the unity of their kin group. As our examples demonstrated, enslaved families utilized multiple strategies to abscond and secure their freedom in the colony. In particular, entire families, as well as varying sets of relatives, attached themselves to larger migrations of runaways, which often contained other family units. Again, this was well documented in the upwards of seven different families that escaped together from Santiggy Nonkoh Lahai in Port Lokkoh. This group was mostly composed of female runaways, including several who fled with small children and even infants. By absconding together and in relatively high numbers, these women and their families were likely better protected from recapture on their journey to Freetown. Moreover, their strategy of fleeing and registering as a large group emphasized the importance of the shared social bonds of these women and their families. They would have continued to rely on this social network, which was forged under slavery and in

flight, as they re-established their lives in Freetown and integrated into urban colonial society. And yet, enslaved kin did not always abscond in this manner. Instead of absconding with a larger group, other families braved the dangers and dislocation of flight on their own. This pattern was exemplified by the account of Baraka and Dehmoh and their five children, who fled their master, Ila Binty, in Kambia during 1891. After Binty threatened to sell them, Baraka and Dehmoh escaped before they and their children were irrevocably torn from each other. By attaining sanctuary and liberation in Freetown, these parents were able to secure the unity of their family.

Thirdly, these case studies are important because they also highlight the additional levels of strategic planning, cooperation, and systems of support that must have been utilized by runaway families, especially those with infants, toddlers, and young children. For example, Baraka and Dehmoh surely would have lent each other emotional and physical support as they made the over 100-kilometer trek from Kambia with their five children, which included an eighteen-month old infant. The mothers and fathers that escaped Santiggy Nonkoh Lahai in Port Lokkoh would have relied on each other in similar ways. The careful planning that undoubtedly went into these escapes was particularly exemplified by the story of the married couple, Sankongie and Boteh. Facing their re-sale, this husband and wife decided to reclaim their freedom in Freetown. But their prospective flight was complicated by two unique factors. First, they were enslaved by two different masters and second, they appeared to be the parental figures of two enslaved children, Foray and Wochai. Their flight would take meticulous coordination, both in terms of caring for the two minors and in evading their former owners. Yet, Sankongie and Boteh successfully executed their plan, managing to safely make it Freetown with the two children in tow. These stories of enslaved kin specifically illustrate the importance of familial

bonds to the enslaved, as well as their resourcefulness and capacity to work together to protect and keep their loved ones safe.

Broadly, this section emphasized the interconnections between enslaved families, interpretations of re-sale as a distinct category of mistreatment, and the lengths slaves went to in order to self-liberate with their kin. It highlighted the centrality of family as a defining component of enslaved life in Sierra Leone. The enslaved population in Sierra Leone consisted of people who were bonded by blood and marriage. The precise nature of some of these relationships, such as the parentage of enslaved children, is contained in the entries for runaway families in the Registers of Escaped Slaves. As demonstrated by their stories, enslaved husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and even grandparents deserted their owners at the mere chance that they or their loved ones would be sold off to a new buyer. Moreover, enslaved kin relied on each other and other families to successfully escape to Freetown. Not only was the threat of re-sale a common and terrifying form of slave mistreatment, it was disproportionately levelled against enslaved families, who often had the most to lose if they were resold.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter began to analyze the spectrum of violence and insecurity that shaped the existence of enslaved people in colonial Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century. From the untapped pages of the Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves, we have precise and difficult details about the challenging lives of the enslaved. In this first of what will be two full chapters on slave mistreatment, it is abundantly clear that tragedy, suffering, and loss were certainties of enslaved life in colonial Sierra Leone. Owners imposed their will upon their slaves, often with little constraint. Slaves could also expect swift and decisive punishments for all sorts

of transgressions or disobedience. Despite the heavy-handedness of masters, enslaved people persevered, and some were lucky enough to self-liberate via slave flight. The voices, actions, and personal histories of many of these individuals are captured in the Registers of Escaped Slaves. By drawing on the entirety of the Registers' runaway slave reports, we are presented with concrete, yet heart-wrenching, evidence on specific ill treatment endured by captives and the sorrowful life of slavery they left behind.

This chapter focused on the most reported form of ill treatment by the enslaved: the threat of re-sale. As a colony essentially located on a slaving coast, it is unsurprising that re-sale loomed ominously over enslaved children, women and men. And slaves faced and interpreted the threat of re-sale in a variety of ways based on different circumstantial factors. As shown, many slaves were subjected to re-sale as punishment for insubordination., while others fled specifically because re-sale threatened the unity of their families. Some former slaves just happened to personally witness the sale of their fellow bondspeople, which was enough to push them to flee and report themselves as fugitive slaves in Freetown. Active local slave trades and the strong demand for slaves in the colony produced a landscape of slavery where the prospect of re-sale represented a credible and serious threat on the very lives of the enslaved. While the threat of re-sale was the most epidemic category of mistreatment in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, enslaved people also suffered through many other identifiable forms of abuse, especially physical traumas. The next chapter continues this exploration of slave mistreatment, focusing particularly on how owners starved, overworked, confined, and violently assaulted their captives.

## CHAPTER 5

### SLAVE MISTREATMENT IN COLONIAL SIERRA LEONE: STARVATION, PHYSICAL VIOLENCE, AND OTHER FORMS OF ABUSE

#### *Introduction*

This chapter continues to explore the definitions and patterns of slave mistreatment in late nineteenth century Sierra Leone. The 1875 to 1894 Registers of Escaped Slaves are teeming with a wide array of evidence on the identities and life histories of survivors of slavery. As such, they contain considerable information on master-slave interactions. These relationships between the enslaver and the enslaved were often underpinned by coercion and violence, as was the case in many other slave societies in Africa and elsewhere. The previous chapter specifically illustrated how these sources can be relied on to identify and track acts of mistreatment from the experiences and testimonials of formerly enslaved subjects. The repercussions of dynamic internal slave trades and the strong demand for captives during the late nineteenth century influenced the most epidemic form of slave abuse found in the Registers: threats of re-sale. Slaveholders used the threat of re-sale to punish and deter unruly behaviour from their captives. Masters were especially quick to use these punitive and coercive tactics against enslaved families, who desperately struggled to maintain their unity under enslavement. When slaves with spouses, children, and other loved ones faced the prospect of re-sale, they often chose to immediately desert their masters, taking their families with them on the run.

The threat of re-sale was by far the most common and most widely reported form of ill treatment suffered by enslaved people Sierra Leone. Its prevalence, both geographically throughout the region and demographically among the enslaved population, was convincing evidence of the inherent vulnerability of enslavement in this historical context. Captives could and were often sold off to other slave owners, locally and within the broader region. But it was not the only action that captives interpreted as unjust treatment. This current chapter builds upon the previous chapter's deep analysis of re-sale by continuing to investigate the broad spectrum of actions that were considered slave mistreatment in Sierra Leone. It will meticulously define and analyze the prevalence the following categories of ill treatment: starvation, broken promises, physical violence, extreme labour demands, and issues related to punishment.

Exploring these various forms of ill treatment will reaffirm the generally precarious nature of slave status, while also shedding needed light on the more violent, oppressive, and cruel acts committed against the enslaved by their masters. Therefore, this chapter continues to reassess past characterizations about master-slave relationships by emphasizing the range and severity of abuses suffered by enslaved people. Slavery in colonial Sierra Leone was indeed more punishing and more coercive than previously understood. The chapter pays close attention to how certain slaves were susceptible to particular forms of ill treatment, as well as to how captives interpreted and responded to this mistreatment. Overall, with the Registers of Escaped Slaves as its source-base, it considers the decisions, movement, and altered life trajectories of the hundreds of slaves who survived the violence of slavery by fleeing to colonial authorities in Freetown. By uncovering and examining this broad and diverse spectrum of abuse committed against the enslaved, this chapter completes the first comprehensive accounting of the categories of slave mistreatment in the region of Sierra Leone.

### *Starvation as Mistreatment*

Starvation represents one of the most explicit and precise definitions of slave mistreatment in late nineteenth century Sierra Leone. Its appearance across multiple years of the Registers indicates that many enslaved women, men, and children in Sierra Leone likely endured the agony of prolonged periods of malnourishment from a lack of adequate food. In total, references to starvation appear in the entries of forty-five different runaway slaves. It was the third most commonly reported form of mistreatment in the Registers, behind the threat of re-sale and excessive labour demands. These cases referencing starvation show up sporadically, with the earliest mention of starvation coming in during 1876 and its last mention appearing in 1892. Moreover, starvation seemed to affect individuals and groups of runaways alike, with the latter often fleeing and arriving in Freetown together. This subset of forty-five individuals who were previously starved by their owners was also diverse ethnically, featuring subjects from seven unique ethnic groups. It also contained women, men, and children from a variety of different locations. These patterns suggest that starvation was less of an isolated phenomenon and likely a more common form of ill treatment, affecting different people in a wide range of different places.

The following four case studies, one individual and three groups of runaways, illustrate the varied experiences of runaways who survived starvation. The first group accounts for over fifty percent of all starvation cases and represents one of the largest sets of runaway slaves fleeing a single owner. Their collective story of slave flight also happens to be one of the most dramatic and detailed in both Registers. On October 12, 1887, a group of twenty-two runaways were registered together, arriving in Freetown from the town of Barlor in the northern region of

the Bullom Shore.<sup>1</sup> Mende, Lokkoh, Bullom, Korankoh, Kamkah, and Temne individuals were represented within this set of entries. Their ages were equally varied, with a sixty-year-old woman named Pooreh as the oldest arrival and Bome Boy, a nine-year-old Temne girl, and Barbara, an infant boy, listed as the youngest of the runaways.<sup>2</sup> According to the groups' entries in the Remarks field, they all claimed to have been deprived of food for an unspecified duration before their arrival, with each person explicitly naming starvation as their motivation to escape slavery. Face with the possibility of a slow and painful death, the group appeared to collectively decide to flee their owner in Barlor. They likely made their way south on foot along the Bullom Shore towards the banks of the Sierra Leone River. Their Remarks field indicates that this group then acquired one or more canoes to cross into the city.<sup>3</sup>

While in the turbulent waters of the River and with Freetown in their sights, their journey took a dramatic and frightening turn. In their Remarks field, the group of twenty-two recounted how they were pursued in the water by their former master, Almanny Amareh, and a canoe of his armed men. They seemed to have been nearly recaptured, but eventually arrived on the shores of Freetown, making landfall on the beach of the Cape Lighthouse on the northern point of the District of Aberdeen. At the lighthouse, they were assisted by a local reverend named Mr. Neville.<sup>4</sup> They were presumably registered shortly thereafter and formally freed by the colonial government. Their entries provide scant information on their lives after registering, with all entries stating that they chose to remain in Freetown and a single statement indicating that Bome

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1885-1894, p. 57, 59. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with the following abbreviation: RES, 1885-1894.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Boy, the nine-year-old Temne girl, was to be enrolled in the Church Missionary Society school for Liberated Africans in the village of Charlotte.<sup>5</sup>

These runaways from the town of Barlor were not the only large group to collectively flee in the face of starvation. In fact, the very first reference to starvation appears in December 1876 in the Remarks field for eight runaways arriving from Susu country in the northern parts of the colony in December 1876.<sup>6</sup> Whereas seven of the twenty-two runaways from Barlor were women, this group was predominantly male, arriving in Freetown with only a single woman. They were also less ethnically diverse, with all but one runaway identifying as Temne, and they were reportedly enslaved by two different owners. Seven runaways declared their former owner as a man named Manga Murry and one, a twenty-two-year-old man named Foray, identified Cearay Bocarry as his former master. These eight runaways were also directly mentioned in the Remarks column of another escaped slave who arrived at least three days beforehand and claimed to originally be part of their group.<sup>7</sup> According to the testimony of this man, Bannah Conteh, the eight runaways fled their owners in Susu country, acquiring at least one canoe along the way, and made landfall between Murry Town and the District of Aberdeen in the northwest region of Freetown. Bannah stated that they arrived in Aberdeen to find something to drink, but he was unexpectedly left behind and later brought to the local police to be registered on his own.<sup>8</sup> The group of eight presumably continued their journey into the city and were registered

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1875-1884, p. 24. Henceforth, this primary source will be referenced with following abbreviation: RES, 1875-1884.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

and declared free on December 23, 1876. In their Remarks column, they each listed the Second Eastern District of Freetown as their place of resettlement.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to groups of runaways, starvation was also cited by individuals as a specific form of mistreatment. For example, in July 1877, a thirty-two-year-old Mendi man named Wonni fled the village of Futa, just west of Freetown, before presenting himself to colonial authorities to register as an fugitive slave.<sup>10</sup> His master was listed as a man named Bocarry and in his Remarks field, he stated specifically that he “escaped for want of food.”<sup>11</sup> Another single case of starvation would similarly appear three years later in November 1880. Again, a single man, in this instance a twenty-five-year-old Temne man named Saisay Konnoh, arrived in Freetown from Susu country. He was formerly enslaved by a man named Laminah.<sup>12</sup> Saisay’s entry in the register stated only “Freetown” as his intended place of resettlement and his Remarks field stated: “Made his escape to the settlement for freedom on account of ill treatment, especially starvation.”<sup>13</sup>

In total, starvation appears forty-five times throughout the Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894. Its appearance in the Remarks field of the Registers, as well as the above descriptions of the runaways who survived it, are evidence that starvation was indeed a specific form of ill treatment in this historical context. In particular, the runaways afflicted by starvation demonstrate the physical hardships and general vulnerability of enslaved life. In addition to the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 114.

regimented labour demands of masters, the enslaved could quickly find themselves without adequate food to survive. As shown above, this uncertainty, as well as the physical agony of malnutrition, pushed slaves to escape to Freetown. Moreover, its prevalence among both individuals and diverse groups, as well as across different years and regions, shows that starvation was not an isolated phenomenon. On the contrary, starvation was likely a very common and widespread form of mistreatment within the broader enslaved population in Sierra Leone.

### *Ill Treatment Through Broken Promises*

Other forms of abuse give additional clarity to ambiguous phrases like “escaped on account of ill treatment and “escaped for freedom”, which were examined in considerable detail in the previous chapter. The Registers of Escaped Slaves, particularly the Remarks field of the volumes, document several instances of broken promises or reneged agreements between the enslaved and their masters. Systems of slavery in Africa and elsewhere were founded upon and preserved by physical force and the ever-present spectre of violence. Whipping, forcible confinement, food deprivation, and the threat of re-sale all represented just some of the methods owners used to effectively punish and maintain power over their human property. Slavery was indeed predicated on violence and owners used violence to impose their will on slaves. Yet, violence and other coercive actions were not the only tools of control implemented by slave owners in colonial West Africa.

For owners, granting certain concessions, promises, or rewards helped to preserve their continued access to reliable free labour, while also discouraging slaves from running away. In her pioneering study of the history of slavery in Lagos, historian Kristin Mann examined the

interplay between the power of slave owners and the continued servility of the enslaved. Like Sierra Leone, Lagos represented one of the earliest experiments in British colonial rule in West Africa. Colonial administrators stationed in Lagos similarly struggled with, or outright ignored, the problem of slavery and slave trading within and near British-controlled zones. In describing the ways in which slave owners rewarded the faithful service of their slaves, Mann stated the following,

The rewards allegedly included such things as allowing slaves to work more autonomously, granting them more free time to work for themselves, helping male slaves marry and establish families, marrying females or giving them in marriage to a free or favored slave man within the family, and permitting slaves to accumulate property and improve their material conditions.<sup>14</sup>

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, as Britain gained a stronger foothold in the region and palm production expanded, the slave owning elite in Lagos commonly promised to “one day give slaves capital to begin trading palm produce on their own or...introduce them to a merchant so that they could get credit in their own names.”<sup>15</sup> Renegotiating the tenets of slave-master relationships was also evident in the Gold Coast Colony, another British possession in West Africa. In order to keep their slaves under their control, owners in the Gold Coast permitted slaves to clear and farm on their unoccupied lands. In other instances, slaves negotiated sharecropping agreements with their owners.<sup>16</sup> Similar dynamics played out between masters and their slaves in Sierra Leone. Historian Ismail Rashid broadly highlighted both the plight of

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<sup>14</sup> Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, p. 220.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa*, p. 133-134; Raymond Dumett and Marion Johnson, “Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, and the Northern Territories” in Roberts and Miers, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa*, p. 88-89.

captives and some of the concessions or rewards they were offered for their continued servitude.

In his study of slavery in Sierra Leone between 1894 and 1928, he stated,

Owners regarded them as disposable chattels and utilized them in arduous farm labour or portage under close supervision. They suffered from the greatest physical coercion and acquired the fewest rights and obligations from their masters. Their lot could be ameliorated over time if they became attached to their owners. Thus with time, 'well-behaved' and hard-working field slaves received wives, personal farm plots and incremental free days.<sup>17</sup>

Even though these rewards, agreements, and promises were designed to be mutually beneficial for both parties, they were still contingent on the will of the slave master. First, while many captives reaped rewards and other benefits from their masters, these arrangements were likely not made available to most slaves. Owners very likely renegotiated or outright broke promises to slaves, who, as Mann describes, "commonly found their hopes and expectations bitterly disappointed."<sup>18</sup> For slaves, these promises had ameliorated some of the conditions of their enslavement and at times, also helped to maintain at least a semblance of peaceful co-existence with their owners. Still, these agreements were inherently provisional, and as shown in colonial Lagos and elsewhere, owners did not always deliver on their promises. Faithfully negotiated concessions could suddenly and unexpectedly be taken away. From the Registers of Escaped Slaves, we can measure the prevalence and impact of broken promises as a distinct form of slave mistreatment in colonial Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century. By reconstructing the experiences of select runaway slaves, the following paragraphs highlight and explain the different variations of the agreements between masters and slaves, and how broken

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<sup>17</sup> Ismail Rashid, "Do Dady nor Lef me Make dem Carry me: Slave Resistance and Emancipation in Sierra Leone, 1894-1928," in Suzanne Miers and Martin Klein, eds., *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), p. 211-212.

<sup>18</sup> Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, p. 221.

promises created deep fissures in slave-master relations, pushing captives to immediately flee in retaliation.

In total, seven escaped slaves referenced a reneged agreement with their master as the prime reason for their flight to Freetown. These runaways originated from different locations, including Susu country in the northern reaches of the colony to as far south as British Sherbro. With two exceptions, the seven runaways each identified as a unique ethnic group and as a group, they consisted of a balanced gender ratio: three males and three females respectively. Even with a relatively small sample, these six cases offer very diverse demographic information, including multiple ethnicities and places of origin, indicating that broken promises may have been a potentially common and widespread form of ill treatment. But closer examination of the complete entries for these six runaways reveals certain characteristics and circumstances that might have gave rise to this specific form of abuse. While this group was relatively diverse in several demographic categories, five of the seven could all be classified as older adult slaves. The group features two individuals that were forty-five years old, a forty-year-old, and two others who listed as thirty-five years old. The lone exceptions were a five-year-old and an 18-month-old infant who both arrived together with one of the five older runaways.

Broken promises were likely commonplace among the wider enslaved population in Sierra Leone but based on the ages of this group, it may have disproportionately affected older slaves. Slaves who were more advanced in age may have exhibited a greater period of faithful servitude, and as Rashid noted, could have earned certain concessions from their masters. Based on the accounts of all seven of these runaways, it is also evident that the enslaved were able to negotiate and carve out different kinds of agreements with their masters. The cases outlined below emphasize the unique circumstances of enslavement for these individuals, as well as

outline the varying types of agreements that were made between the enslaved and their owners. These promises were evidently held in high regard by the enslaved and when owners went back on their word, it engendered outright resistance.

The first distinct model of these agreements was centered around a slave master's promise to not carry out a certain action. This took many forms, but more often than not it involved a pledge by slave owners to not sell their slaves' family members to another owner. For instance, owners would promise not to sell their slaves' children, spouses, or other loved ones. In exchange, slave owners presumably received, at a minimum, the continued loyalty and obedience of their slaves. Slave owners essentially used the bonds and family ties of their slaves as a tool to maintain control over the slaves' labour. When owners broke these promises by abruptly selling their slaves' family members, it could cause a distinct break in the slave-master relationship. For a few of the individuals in the Register, the selling of a loved one was the primary reason for ending their enslavement and claiming freedom in Freetown.

This sort of pact in which a slave owner refrained from selling a slave's loved ones is found in the Remarks field of a runaway named Damlay Coray. Damlay, a forty-year-old Korankoh woman, was formally registered as an escaped slave in January 1885.<sup>19</sup> She had fled her master, Mormodo Yoram, in Ro Wharf Koya, trekking at least thirty kilometers north to Freetown. During her registration, Damlay recounted her reason for escaping and explained that Mormodo Yoram had unexpectedly sold her three children to another slave owner.<sup>20</sup> For Damlay, this broken covenant with her former master, namely the assurance that he would not resell her

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<sup>19</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

children, represented an emotionally devastating form of mistreatment and a very convincing motivator to flee. It marked a distinct shift in how she navigated her relationship with her master, Mormodo Yoram. She was willing to endure the exploitation and servility of slavery if she was reassured that her children would not be resold. But, after her master went back on his word, Damlay's circumstances were no longer tolerable and she chose to end her enslavement. Her entry in the Registers noted that she later took up residence with Elizabeth Wilson of Fourah Bay Road in Freetown.<sup>21</sup>

Mormodo Yoram was not the only master to use these kinds of agreements to control the lives and labour of their slaves. The loved ones of the enslaved were routinely leveraged by other owners to extort loyalty and obedience. The first mention of broken promises in the Registers shares many of the same characteristics of Damlay Coray's experience. On May 10, 1877, a thirty-five-year-old Mandingo woman named Jeley Carnee reported herself as a runaway slave in Freetown.<sup>22</sup> She disclosed that she was previously enslaved by a woman named Hawa Silah in Fatah, which may have been the present-day village of Futa, located west of the Freetown Peninsula and several kilometers south of the Sierra Leone River. Jeley explained to colonial officials what she endured as an enslaved person and specifically why she ran away. Her remarks field contained this statement:

She came to the settlement with her mistress who brought some oxen for sale and being offended at her mistress for selling her daughter and being ill treated always by her, she takes advantage of claiming her freedom fearing she might be sold as her daughter was sold.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

Jeley's retelling of her enslavement and the circumstances leading to her escape reveals elements of a negotiated agreement between herself and her mistress, Hawa Silah. Jeley's continued loyalty and labour as a slave were likely levied for Hawa Silah's promise that Jeley's daughter would not be sold off. From her account of carrying livestock to Freetown, as well as her statement that she herself was ill treated too, Jeley had indeed held up her end of the bargain. But when her daughter was unexpectedly sold, Jeley could no longer tolerate Hawa Silah's conditions of slavery and chose to escape shortly after her arrival in Freetown. Her entry in the Register noted that she chose to remain in Freetown after her liberation, but with no indication of her ever reuniting with her daughter.<sup>24</sup>

Just over a month later, another runaway arrived in Freetown, similarly denouncing his owner for the sudden loss of a loved one. This case however was not about the selling of a child, but instead it focused on an owner's promise to keep a slave's wife. On June 23, 1877, a forty-five-year-old Temne man named Lahie was recorded in the Register of Escaped Slaves by the colonial government in Freetown.<sup>25</sup> He had fled his owner Ansunameh Konkoh in British Koya territory. In his Remarks field, Lahie outlined his treatment as a slave and the specific circumstances that led to his escape. He expressed sorrow for the loss of his wife, who was also a slave, after she was sold off to another master.<sup>26</sup> Lahie did not reference or even allude to physical abuse or other forms of ill treatment. In its place was only his contempt for his owner's

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

sudden decision and understandable grief over the loss of his wife. For Lahie, it was this broken promise that sparked his flight to Freetown.

Likewise, just over two years later in 1879, a Sherbro woman named Daymoh Nancy fled to the city with an equally tragic story of enslavement and betrayal.<sup>27</sup> In her Remarks field, Daymoh revealed that her former owner suddenly sold her husband to another owner. This development broke the trust she and her family had built with their master and directly led to her escape. She explained further that if her husband could be resold, she herself could be sold off, and her two children too.<sup>28</sup> Had her former owner kept his word, Daymoh very likely would not have fled. Yet, once the promise was broken, the risk of being separated from her children was far too great. Daymoh was registered as an escaped slave on December 26, 1879.<sup>29</sup> Her son, five-year-old Laddo, and eighteen-month-old daughter, Yaisy, were registered on the same day and appear immediately in the next two entries.<sup>30</sup> Daymoh managed to safely escape to Freetown with both her children in tow.

A reneged agreement between master and slave was a potentially devastating form of abuse in the minds of the enslaved. Owners commonly vowed to keep the spouses and children of the enslaved together to maintain their loyalty and subservience. But this was not the only type of promise that masters made to placate their human property. The Remarks field in the Registers feature an additional variation of a pledge made and later broken by slave owners. Although the enslaved often negotiated pacts with their owners to protect their spouses, children, and other

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

family members from being resold, other slaves pressed their owners for different concessions. Rather than refraining from a particular action, like the reselling of their slaves' loved ones, owners also agreed to carry out certain actions at the request of or for the benefit of their captives.

The Remarks field for a runaway slave who was registered in 1886 features this model of agreement. On July 27, 1886, a man of Sangareh descent named Momodoo Koombay was recorded as an escaped slave at Freetown.<sup>31</sup> According to his entry in the Register, he was forty-five years old and had been held in slavery at the nearby village of Kobah, located on the southeastern side of the Freetown Peninsula. His former owner, a Susu man known only as Sarrah, had brought him to the city to sell oxen. But this was not a typical trading mission to Freetown for the two. On this trip to the city, Momodoo was particularly vexed with Sarrah over a broken promise. In his Remarks column, he stated that he escaped because his owner recently took away a woman who was previously given to him as a wife.<sup>32</sup> Momodoo's account of his ill treatment alludes to a prior agreement between him and his owner, Sarrah, who promised to provide him with a wife. After the woman was taken away or resold, he viewed it as a distinct violation of the initial promise. Based on Momodoo Koombay's account, it was not the labour of enslavement, nor physical abuse, that pushed him to escape. Instead, it was his owner's failure to deliver on a promise that triggered his flight and eventual liberation.

Enslaved people in late nineteenth century Sierra Leone ameliorated the conditions of their enslavement by building trust and brokering agreements with their owners. In most

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<sup>31</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

instances, slaves lobbied for the protection of their family members at the cost of their continued subservience. And yet, these agreements only represented uneasy and temporary truces. As shown in the preceding examples, owners broke their promises, often with tragic consequences for the enslaved. There is no evidence of Damlay Coray or Jeley Carnee ever reuniting with the children they lost, nor is it known if Daymoh Nancy ever found her husband, who had been sold off to another owner. Broken promises were indeed a distinct category of ill treatment in this context. The pain and loss endured by these individuals are pertinent reminders of the stark and often unforgiving nature of slavery in the colony of Sierra Leone.

### *Physical Violence as Ill Treatment*

The enslaved experience in colonial Sierra Leone was also characterized by physical violence. Slave masters committed violent and coercive actions to control and discipline their bondspeople. Like slavery in other areas and historical periods, slavery in Africa was historically rooted in physical violence and the fear of violence. In historian Paul E. Lovejoy's extensive survey of the history of African slavery, he contends the transformation from free to enslaved was predicated on violence, typically in the form of warfare, kidnapping, banditry, and other forms of coercion.<sup>33</sup> Violence also underpinned the continued interactions between master and slave, namely in how masters imposed their will on slaves and the methods used to punish or quell disobedience. Lovejoy also emphasizes that

Whipping, confinement, deprivation of food, additional hard work, and the ability to dispose of slaves through sale were common means of coercion...The example of other

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<sup>33</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, p. 3-4.

slaves being punished or sold and the knowledge that the master could do so were usually sufficient to maintain slave discipline.<sup>34</sup>

Violence and the threat of violence loomed over the landscape of African slavery. As Lovejoy concludes, “The knowledge of the horrors of enslavement and the fear of arbitrary action produced in slaves both a psychology of servility and the potential for rebellion.”<sup>35</sup> Enslaved life in colonial Sierra Leone reflected this “dual personality”<sup>36</sup> of African slavery and master-slave relationships. By concentrating on slaves who endured bodily harm before escaping to Freetown, the following paragraphs simultaneously emphasize the ways in which raw physical violence served as effective methods to both keep slaves in check and sow the seeds of their resistance.

The Registers of Escaped Slaves are comprised of explicit accounts of violent acts committed against the enslaved. The Remarks field in particular contains horrific details on how slaves were physically beaten, constrained, as well as the painful aftermath of these actions. The patterns of violence within in the Registers suggests physical abuse as a distinctive classification of ill treatment among the enslaved population in Sierra Leone and its immediate hinterlands. Overall, descriptions of physical violence and intimidation appear in seven separate entries, affecting a broad selection of peoples. As a group, they consist of adult men and women of varying ages, ethnicities, and places of origins. For ethnicity, four different ethnicities are represented in this group of six entries alone, which included runaways of Mendi, Temne, Gallinas, and Kossuh descent. Outright violence and physical abuse may also have been carried out disproportionately against adult slaves, considering that all six ranged from their early

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

twenties and thirties, with only one victim listed as forty years old. Yet, this conclusion is likely not definitive, given such a small sample of runaways. In addition to these demographic details, there are also distinct qualitative patterns in the former slaves' accounts of the physical harm they endured. In their Remarks field, a few entries describe only the violence endured by the runaways, and others include additional descriptions of the injuries sustained from those instances of physical trauma. Together, they help to sketch a more comprehensive picture of the brutality and real dangers of enslaved life in Sierra Leone.

Four of the six slaves described only the bodily harm inflicted upon them by their masters. In other words, these four individuals outlined how they were beaten or abused but left out whatever injuries they undoubtedly sustained. But their retelling of their physical traumas offers additional information on the actions that were deemed ill treatment in this context. For example, on June 17, 1877, a thirty-two-year-old Temne woman named Rokoh Granby was registered as an escaped slave in Freetown.<sup>37</sup> In her conversation with representatives of the colonial government, Rokoh conveyed different details about her escape and life as an enslaved woman, some of which were transcribed into her Remarks column. She explained, for example, that her former owner, Marquick Granby, was a British Subject from the Wellington neighborhood of Freetown. She even delved into Marquick Granby's lineage and background by stating that his mother was in fact of Temne descent.<sup>38</sup> In addition to these aspects of her life, Rokoh also recounted her motivations for escaping to Freetown. She described her physical mistreatment at the hands of Maquick Granby, who forced Rokoh into stocks in preparation to

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<sup>37</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

sell her to another owner. In her retelling of these events, the agony and helplessness of the stocks seemed to ignite her resiliency. Soon after she was immobilized by her master, she found a way to break free and flee to Freetown. In her journey, which at least partially involved travel by canoe, she landed at Tambo Island near the mouths of the Rokel and Bankasoka Rivers. There, she was helped by a British subject named David W.M. Land, who escorted her to Freetown to register as an escaped slave. After she reported to the colonial government, it was stated that Rokoh intended to stay with a Freetown resident named Monday Yemah.<sup>39</sup> While she was able to find sanctuary in Freetown, her story of being physically restrained in stocks gives at least some specificity to categories of mistreatment in Sierra Leone.

This brand of physical abuse appears nearly five years later in the Remarks field of three escaped slaves from the inland town of Port Lokkoh. The story of these three former slaves were briefly outlined at the beginning of the chapter to shed light on the everyday violence that characterized slavery, as well as the resiliency of the enslaved themselves. The experiences of these three runaways certainly capture those elements of enslaved life, but they also bring attention to the use of stocks as instruments to physically punish, torture, and control wayward slaves. In April 1883, two twenty-five-year-old Gallinas men, Foday and Canray, and a twenty-year old Mende woman named Gbanjah, were recorded together as runaway slaves.<sup>40</sup> In their three entries in the Register, colonial scribes listed their previous owner as a woman named Hannah Pleasant, a British Subject, who resided in Port Lokkoh.<sup>41</sup> In the Remarks field of their

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

entries, Foday, Canray, and Gbanjah retold the circumstances of their enslavement and subsequent flight to Freetown, which was evidently almost cut short in the coastal town of Pepel. After escaping Hannah Pleasant's confines in Port Lokkoh, the three presumably headed southwest towards Freetown, but they were suddenly recaptured and severely punished by local slave traders working in Pepel. The runaways were forcibly placed into stocks for three straight days while their new captors prepared to sell them off to different slave owners.<sup>42</sup> Yet, this ostensibly bleak situation did not deter Foday, Canray, and Gbanjah. Shortly after they were taken out of their stocks, the three cleverly stole a nearby canoe and fled to Freetown, where they were officially liberated from slavery and listed in the Register of Escaped Slaves.<sup>43</sup> Their forced and likely excruciating confinement to stocks for multiple days is another example of physical abuse as a category of ill treatment. Moreover, these experiences are stark reminders of the heavy-handed and oppressive conditions of enslaved life in this historical context.

The above examples bring attention to instances of physical abuse inflicted on slaves but provide very little emphasis on the resulting bodily injuries of this brand of ill treatment. Further cases of physical abuse in the Register, however, can be used to illustrate the precise and painful injuries sustained by the enslaved. In essence, these supplementary cases provide a more complete depiction of the violence perpetrated upon the enslaved and its lasting effects. One of the most vivid retellings of an owner's physical abuse is found by revisiting the story of Mophey, whose Remarks field contained the longest and most detailed explanation for escape across both

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<sup>42</sup> Foday, Canray, Gbanjah's accounts of forcible confinement and the threat of re-sale are rare examples of Remarks entries that contain more than one specific type of ill treatment. There were only 25 entries in in both Registers that reference multiple forms of slave abuse.

<sup>43</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 184.

Registers. His story was very briefly explored earlier in this chapter to emphasize the volume of information that can be gleaned from the Remarks section of the Registers, especially in relation to the conditions of slavery and the fortitude of the enslaved.

According to Mophey's narrative, which extended onto an attached document written by Freetown's Police Magistrate, W. Doorly, he was enslaved at the inland village of Rotifunk, southeast of the Freetown Peninsula, before escaping to the coast in May 1876. He seemed to have boarded a canoe with a woman named Bitsy Shilling, who brought Mophey to her home in the district of Aberdeen at the western point of Freetown.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, Bitsy Shilling did not have Mophey's best interests in mind. In Aberdeen, Bitsy Shilling employed a local named William Cole to detain him and force him onto a canoe at Aberdeen Wharf. Mophey stated that "while he was in the canoe, the cords with which his hands were tied was loosened by one of the persons on board the canoe, he then took the opportunity of jumping into the sea and swimming ashore."<sup>45</sup> Like other runaway slaves citing physical abuse, Mophey's captor physically bound him against his will. But the account of his ordeal extends further to identify additional mistreatment carried out against him, as well as his resulting injuries. In the attachment to his Remarks column, colonial scribes transcribed a more in-depth description of Mophey's escape and near re-enslavement. In the second paragraph, they reveal that shortly after he was apprehended in Aberdeen by William Cole, he was severely beaten with a walking stick by Bitsy Shilling herself.<sup>46</sup> The note then outlines the specifications of the stick, identifying it as an inch and half thick and made of hardwood. It also describes the bodily injuries Mophey sustained

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

from this violent assault, stating that he was left with a considerable contusion on the top of his right shoulder.<sup>47</sup> Shortly after the infliction of this bodily harm, Mophey jumped overboard and presumably swam ashore back to Aberdeen. After his painful and life-threatening ordeal, the colonial government was suddenly unable to track Mophey's whereabouts, with Magistrate emphatically stating that the former slave had "truly ran away."<sup>48</sup>

In general, Mophey's account reaffirms corporal abuse as a distinct category of ill treatment carried out by owners. Its substantial depth of information serves to shed bright light on the physical tolls of enslaved life in colonial Sierra Leone, and even provides a rare description of one of the actual weapons used by masters to control and bludgeon their slaves. And Mophey's Remarks field was not the only entry that outlined the physical harm and long-term damage inflicted on slaves by heavy-handed masters. For this example, we can go back to the story of Daymoh Mahyah, whose entry in the Register of Escaped Slaves was explored in Chapter Three to emphasize the unique and challenging experiences of enslaved women in colonial Sierra Leone. Daymoh Mahyah was a thirty-year-old Temne woman, who, like many other female slaves, was forced to marry her master. She was registered as an escaped slave in July 1885.<sup>49</sup> In her Remarks field, scribes reiterated that her master, Lamina Ceasay, bought Daymoh and "subsequently took her as his wife."<sup>50</sup> It also stated that Lamina took Daymoh into Freetown to trade oxen in the city's commercial markets. In Freetown, Daymoh's plight would only worsen as she became the target of severe physical and sexual abuse. While bartering their

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

oxen, Lamina assaulted and gravely injured Daymoh, who, as revealed in her Remarks column, was pregnant at the time.<sup>51</sup>

This callous abuse caused a miscarriage and the loss of Daymoh's unborn child. Her entry in the Register tragically states that "on account of ill treatment from which abortion took place with her."<sup>52</sup> Her experience exemplifies the unique vulnerabilities that characterized enslaved life for women in Sierra Leone and its surrounding hinterlands. For Daymoh, her enslavement was not only shaped by her forced marriage to her captor, but also by the enduring threat and consequences of brutal physical violence. After being assaulted by Lamina, Daymoh reported herself as an escaped slave and chose to remain in Freetown. In a Register of Escaped Slaves that is filled with vague, formulaic, and at times, brief descriptions of enslaved life, Daymoh Mahyah and Mophey's entries deliver extremely rare accounts into the bodily harm inflicted upon slaves and its resulting consequences. The retelling of their lived experiences is evidence that enslaved people were beaten, maimed, and emotionally and physically scarred by their owners. Their stories, along with others discussed above, are stark reminders of the on the ground violence and everyday malice that upheld the practice of slavery in colonial Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century.

*"Escaped Due to Rigorous Servitude": Mistreatment and Excessive Labour Regimens*

Thus far, the Registers of Escaped Slaves have been used to thoroughly illuminate the wide range of coercive and punitive tactics slave masters used to impose their will upon their

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

human property. The enslaved survived major physical violence, threats of re-sale, and many even teetered on the brink of starvation. These specific actions and conditions, among others, were thought of by the enslaved as severe forms of mistreatment and were therefore prime motivators for slave flight. In addition to these accounts, a relatively large segment of the runaways in the Registers articulated how they survived another form of ill treatment: their masters' extreme labour expectations.

In the 1152 total cases in both Registers of Escaped Slaves, 81 subjects directly referenced the rigorous labour demands of their previous masters. In the majority of these runaway slave entries, excessive work expectations were emphasized by the former captives as the central factor in their decision to abscond. This dataset of 81 entries were examined in Chapter Three, which focused on the work and deployment of slaves in the colony and its hinterlands. In studying these cases, my findings showed that nearly all demographic segments of captives, regardless of geographic location, were overworked by their masters. Chapter Three concluded that excessive labour demands were likely a universal component of the enslaved experience in Sierra Leone, as they were in many other slave societies in Africa and elsewhere.

This section reframes these findings about the generally exploitative labour conditions of slavery in Sierra Leone. Slaves were worked and they were evidently worked very hard. Such practices were meant to maximize the productive output of individual slaves, underscoring the acquisitive principles of slaveholding in the colony. But the 81 cases dealing with hard labour additionally shed light on other aspects of slave-masters relationships in this context. In particular, a master's decision to overwork his or her captives constituted a precise and significant form of slave mistreatment. As the 81 cases across the Registers emphasize, the rigorous servitude of slavery was a common and widely reported grievance against masters, one

that could warrant a response of flight. Therefore, not only do the 81 cases stress the economic underpinnings of slavery, they are also pertinent reminders of the coercive, violent, and unrelenting struggles of enslaved life in Sierra Leone.

Oppressive labour regimes were major sources of slave flights across West Africa and within the broader region of the Sierra Leone Colony. The correlation between excessive work demands and the wholesale flight of captives, for example, was an important thread in Martin Klein and Richard Roberts seminal study of the Banamba slave exodus in French West Africa. Banamba, located in present-day Mali, was an interior transshipment point for goods and people to coastal areas and to North Africa via the trans-Saharan routes. Enslaved people were regularly conveyed to the peanut fields of coastal Senegal, and the plantations surrounding Banamba and other interior towns also stimulated the demand for captives.<sup>53</sup> According to Klein and Roberts, slaves “were systematically exploited to produce goods for trade.” They described the conditions of slavery in the environs of Banamba as the harshest in West Africa.<sup>54</sup> Slave unrest reached a boiling point in 1905 when thousands of bondspeople collectively deserted their owners, with many enslaved runaways choosing to return to their original homelands.<sup>55</sup> The French tried to minimize this upheaval of the enslaved population by mediating a resolution between masters and their former captives. It was unsurprising that one of the major demands of the Banamba slaves was for better and more regulated labour conditions.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Roberts and Martin Klein, “The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 21, 3 (1980), p. 379.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 388.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 389.

More than a century earlier in the 1780s and 1790's in Sierra Leone, captives escaped their masters and initiated a protracted slave revolt in the polity of Moriah. As Rashid outlined, Moriah was a prominent slaveholding society and a major center for interior and coastal trade. The majority of its population consisted of captives, who were heavily exploited in the production of rice and other lucrative commodities. According to Rashid, "the general strategy of the Moriah slave-owners was to work new captured slaves brutally on their rice plantation[s]."<sup>57</sup> Single villages of captives cultivated or produced upwards of 100 tons of rice and salt annually.<sup>58</sup> In response, the slaves of Moriah, many of which were Temne, Bullom and other ethnicities, abandoned their owners, created maroon communities, and waged a violent and decade-long insurrection against their former masters.<sup>59</sup> Rashid summarized these reactions to the brutal labour of slavery in Moriah by flatly stating that "the harshness of their servitude and the tyranny of their masters contributed to the revolt."<sup>60</sup>

The extreme labour demands of slaveholders were clearly a source of contention for enslaved people, especially within the hinterlands of the Sierra Leone Colony. Being overworked and overextended constituted a precise and harsh form of slave mistreatment. As we know from Chapter Three, the 81 runaways in the Registers of Escaped Slaves evidence the potential universality of harsh slave labour practices in Sierra Leone. Since all 81 of these former captives cited "hard labour" as a prime reason for their escape, these cases also highlight how enslaved

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<sup>57</sup> Ismail Rashid, "Escape, Revolt, and Marronage in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone Hinterland," *The Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 3, Special Issue: On Slavery and Islam in African History: A Tribute to Martin Klein (2000), p. 667.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 667-670.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 667.

women, men, and children of all origins were subjugated to this form of ill treatment. Rather than explore all 81 examples of hard labour, which was already a focal point of Chapter Three, we can draw on just two sets of case studies from this dataset to emphasize hard labour as a category of slave mistreatment.

In 1876, a group of sixty captives arrived in Freetown and reported themselves to colonial authorities as escaped slaves. They had been enslaved in Port Lokkoh and all sixty fled because of the strenuous labour demands of their former master. Their sudden appearance in the colony represented the single largest arrival of runaway slaves during the twenty-year timespan of the Registers of Escaped Slaves. While colonial scribes did not record each runaway's name and personal details, which was likely due to sheer size of the group, they included a brief summary outlining the circumstances of the sixty slaves' enslavement and flight from Port Lokkoh. This summary appeared on the back of the last page for the runaway entries for 1876. It was comprised of the following text,

There are 60 escaped slaves who came to 2<sup>nd</sup> Eastern District in November last but not reported, they are composed of men, women, and children and they came from the Port Locco District, they belonged to the son of the late Ali Bundoo of Port Locco and escaped because of rigorous servitude under which they had been put.<sup>61</sup>

Our second case study of hard labour as ill treatment shows up in January 1887, over ten years after the group of sixty runaways arrived from Port Lokkoh. From the details recorded in their Remarks column, this cluster of seven runaways had evidently survived particularly difficult circumstances. Under the servitude of their former owner, Kindoe, who was listed as a "Bullom man", the seven had been overworked, threatened with re-sale, and they had endured

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<sup>61</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 26.

other unspecified forms of abuse.<sup>62</sup> The seven captives endured this multitude of mistreatment, until they found a chance to collectively escape. They probably fled south from Kindoe's confines, which was listed as the small coastal village of Manika on the Bullom Shore, before crossing the Sierra Leone River and arriving in Freetown. Demographically, these seven runaways from Manika were quite diverse, exhibiting considerable variation in ages, genders and ethnicities. In addition to featuring subjects in their 40's, 30's, and 20's, the group also included an eight-year-old boy Bullom boy named Pinta Moodoo. Regarding their gender ratio, five of these runaways were male and two, Labba Tenneh and Boye Mennie, were recorded as female.<sup>63</sup> And finally, the seven belonged to six distinct local ethnic groups. After interviewing these new arrivals from Manika, colonial officials in Freetown transcribed the ensuing passage across their Remarks fields, "Made their escape to the Settlement on account of hard slavery and being threatened to be resold into slavery; also ill-treatment."<sup>64</sup> After reclaiming their freedom, the seven resettled in the coastal district of Aberdeen in Freetown.

These two case studies aid in illustrating the identities, experiences, and responses of enslaved people who were overworked by their masters. In addition to shining light on large-scale slaveholding operations in the hinterland of Sierra Leone, the collective account of the sixty escaped slaves from Port Lokkoh in 1876 are convincing evidence of how slaves survived and interpreted hard labour regimes. Their owner's unrelenting demands of "rigorous servitude" was viewed by the group as serious form of abuse, which needed to be rectified by a mass

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<sup>62</sup> RES 1885-1894, p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

exodus. In addition, their summary in the Register notes that the group of sixty was comprised of men, women, and children, indicating that hard labour was not contingent on the age or gender.

The second case study, which focused on the seven runaways from Manika, reaffirms and expands on these conclusions. Their experiences demonstrate that slave owners brutally exploited the labour of males and females of widely varying ages. In addition, based on their extremely diverse ethnic origins, their cases are also an indication that slaves of many different backgrounds were relentlessly overworked by slave masters. As Chapter Three showed, unjust and excessive work expectations were unfortunately a common and widespread component of enslaved life in Sierra Leone, as it was in other slave societies. Yet, as we have shown in this section, these extreme labour conditions also constituted a precise, significant, and widely reported type of slave mistreatment. The above case studies, as well as rest of the 81 cases that cited hard labour, are convincing evidence of the real women, men, and children who survived this especially coercive and exploitive aspect of slavery in Sierra Leone.

### *Pawning, Enslavement, and the Ill Treatment of Captives*

Pawnship and issues surrounding their original enslavement were also key factors in captives' perceptions of and responses to ill treatment. Thus far, this chapter has demonstrated how slave masters punished and coerced their human property with brute violence, deliberate starvation, and extreme labour demands, among other precise forms of ill treatment. But for some of the formerly enslaved subjects in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, the gravest form of mistreatment was their original enslavement and their continued subjugated status. In other words, from the perspectives of many runaway slaves, the very notion that they had been

enslaved and held in bondage was a severe wrongdoing and on its own, served as a principal reason for flight.

For instance, as was briefly outlined in the previous chapter on the Registers, 140 runaway slaves in the Registers used phrases such as “escaped to attain freedom” or “escaped because he was a slave” to explain their motivations for absconding their owners. This kind of language appears in approximately 12% of the total cases in the two logbooks of escaped slaves. These cases are useful in highlighting how ordinary slaves wanted to reclaim their freedom and consciously chose to flee rather than remain under slavery. While they are important examples of slaves’ condemnation of enslaved status, these cases offer very limited information on the nuances of a slave’s life, including their treatment or work routines, or the circumstances of their original enslavement. The minimalist nature of these kinds of transcriptions is exemplified in one of the first reports in the 1885-1894 Register of Escaped Slaves. On March 11, 1885, a nineteen-year-old Mende man named Camray Tebin was formally recorded as a runaway slave and subsequently freed by the colonial government in Freetown.<sup>65</sup> He had arrived in the city after having fled his former master, Murry Lalloofoo, in the town of Port Lokkoh. The transcription of Camray’s reason for escaping was relatively simple, stating only that the young man had “made his escape to attain freedom.”<sup>66</sup> Although Camray’s entry in the Register offers details on his identity, personal details, and his flight from Port Lokkoh, it reveals next to nothing about the specific conditions or experiences that shaped his enslavement and pushed him to self-liberate. Instead, we are left with minimal details, explaining only that Camray essentially fled because he was a slave. These kinds of explanations commonly appear throughout the Registers. For

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 1-2.

enslaved people, the very act and condition of enslavement was an egregious injustice which could be rectified by flight.

However, by consulting more detailed cases in the Registers, we are offered needed clarity on the specific factors that shaped these grievances against the very condition of enslaved status. In particular, a small handful of cases shed light on the central role of pawnship both in the initial enslavement of former captives and in shaping their decisions to self-liberate with Sierra Leone government at Freetown. Pawnship was a “system in which individuals are held in debt bondage as collateral for loans.”<sup>67</sup> As Lovejoy and Toyin Falola noted, pawning was long entrenched in the history of various parts of Africa, developing in tandem with the transatlantic slave trade and the expansion slavery within the continent, and flourishing in the late nineteenth century. Economic decline, food scarcity, epidemic disease, droughts, and other hardships led to

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<sup>67</sup> Falola, Toyin and Paul E. Lovejoy, “Pawnship in Historical Perspective,” in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 1. The scholarship on the history of pawning in West Africa is extensive. Just in Falola and Lovejoy’s edited volume, there are several chapters on pawnship and precolonial and colonial West Africa. Some of these studies included: Robin Law, “On Pawning and Enslavement for Debt in the Pre-Colonial Slave Coast,” in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 55-70, Felix K. Ekechi “Pawnsip in Igbo Society,” in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 83-104, Gareth Austin, “Human Pawning in Asante, 1800-1950: Markets and Coercion, Gender and Cocoa,” in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 119-160, Judith Byfield, “Pawns and Politics: The Pawnship Debate in Western Nigeria,” in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 187-216, Allen M. Howard, “Pawning in Coastal Northwest Sierra Leone, 1860-1910,” in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 267-284, and Martin Ford, “Indirect Rule and the Brief Apogee of Pawnship in Nimba, Liberia, 1918-1930,” in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 285-302. There are several other important publications on pawning West Africa, such as Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, “Trust, Pawnship and Atlantic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Calabar Slave Trade,” *The American Historical Review*, 104, 2, (April 1999), pp. 333-255. Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, “The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600-1810,” *The Journal of African History*, 42, 1 (2001), pp 67-89.

increases in pawning.<sup>68</sup> Families and households put up their own relatives and even their children as collateral on loans, and in some instances, individuals could volunteer themselves as pawns to stop their loved ones from being put into bondage.<sup>69</sup> Regarding the criteria for pawns, Lovejoy and Falola state that “in order for an individual to have use as collateral, it was essential that the debtor want to redeem the person.”<sup>70</sup> Even though pawnship was different from the practice of slavery,<sup>71</sup> it still could function as a mechanism of enslavement when debtors defaulted on their loans. Historian Sean Stilwell reiterates this connection between enslavement and pawnship by emphasizing that “pawns could be and were converted into slaves.”<sup>72</sup> In the Registers of Escaped Slaves for Sierra Leone, there are five separate examples of former captives who had originally been pawned by their relatives. Their transformation from free persons to

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<sup>68</sup> Howard, “Pawning in Coastal Northwest Sierra Leone,” p. 268-269.

<sup>69</sup> Falola and Lovejoy, “Pawnship in Historical Perspective,” p. 8

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> In theory, systems of slavery and pawning were fundamentally different, but in practice, they were very similar. Individuals who were pawned were not automatically sold into slavery. Pawns were still connected to their original kin or descent group. In theory, they were not supposed to be bought or sold, nor were they the absolute property of their masters. Moreover, by their association to the debtor, which was usually a family member, pawns had certain rights and options to contest abuse or breaches of the pawnship agreement. These characteristics distinguished pawnship from slavery. But, like the practice of slavery, creditors often exercised total control over the labour output of their pawns. Also, in practice, the rights of pawns could be easily violated. Many pawns were converted into slaves. Stilwell, *Slavery and Slave Trading in African History* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 14-15; Falola and Lovejoy, “Pawnship in Historical Perspective,” p. 4. These blurred distinctions between pawnship and slavery in West Africa were reiterated by Howard in his case study of pawning in colonial Sierra Leone. He argued that the similarities between the two practices caused confusion among the colony’s administrators, who struggled to differentiate between the two practices, especially as they tried to more actively combat slavery in the early twentieth century. Howard, “Pawning in Coastal Northwest Sierra Leone,” p. 270.

<sup>72</sup> Stilwell, *Slavery and Slave Trading in African History*, p. 15.

pawns and then to slaves significantly influenced their perceptions of enslavement and mistreatment, and their decisions to flee.

These factors, particularly the interplay of pawnship and slave flight, are well-illustrated by the experiences of a twelve-year-old female runaway named Sebbah, whose entry was briefly examined as part of the subsection on threats of re-sale in Chapter Four. In the case of Sebbah, before she escaped, she had been sold to a Fula man and evidently had been almost conveyed from Freetown to Fula territories. These circumstances played a central role in her decision to escape, as did her prior experience as a pawn. She was registered on June 28, 1885,<sup>73</sup> and her Remarks field contained the following text,

The child states that she was pledged by an uncle of hers and afterwards sold to a Foulah man named Momodoo Foulah who brought her down with the view of taking her to Foulah country; landing at Tasso Island near the Sierra Leone River she managed to conceal herself in the bush. She was found by Mr. Jarwah residing at that place who took her to Mr. Foresythe at [...] and Mr. Foresythe then sent her to Freetown. Luckily in coming of the Government Interpreter house, she met up with her uncle Chief Abdul Lahai Kollokoh with whom she desires to return to her mother in her country.<sup>74</sup>

A letter from this Mr. Foresythe, addressed to the Government Interpreter Thomas George Lawson, was attached to Sebbah's entry in the Register and it provides additional details about her journey to reclaim her freedom:

The girl who accompanied the bearer of this [letter], was sent [to] me an hour ago from Tassoh Bomp, by a Jarwah of that place stating that four days ago some Foulah people with cows in their canoe, on their way to Freetown, landed to wait for tide at Tassoh Bomp; whilst there this girl ran away from her master and she hid herself in the bush; one of Jarwah's men found her and she said that she was a slave; where from she was detained to obtain her freedom — on this being told me, I directed Jarwah to take the girl

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<sup>73</sup> RES, 1885-1894, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

to you, so that she may be securely placed and not be left exposed to the chances of being sent to slavery.<sup>75</sup>

This lengthy transcription of Sebbah's story sheds a great deal of light on her life trajectory and her determination to escape slavery, especially her decision to run away from Momodoo Foulah and hide herself in the undergrowth of Tasso Island. Her entry in the Register also documents the presence of slave and cattle dealers operating in Freetown, the role of the Government Interpreter in processing of fugitive slaves in the colony, and of course, the presence of pawning in the region.

Sebbah's disclosure of her prior status as a pawn showcases how pawnship influenced paths to freedom for former slaves. Based on her detailed testimony, it can be presumed that she was a free person before she was pledged by one of her uncles. In fact, her memory of being pawned was still fresh in her mind as it appeared to be one of the first details she shared during her intake with the colonial government. In addition, her conversion from pawn to slave seemed to be a very recent development because she escaped while her new master was still in the process of conveying her to his homelands in Fula territory. These elements of her experience, which were all set in motion after she was pawned, forced Sebbah to escape with considerable haste and urgency. As a subject who was only recently enslaved, she likely would have viewed slavery as an abhorrent and especially dangerous condition. This attitude and resilience towards enslavement manifested itself in her decision to desperately flee and physically hide from her captors at Tasso before they could transport her to unfamiliar territory in Fula country.

Also, as a former pawn and newly enslaved person, Sebbah maintained both a clear memory of and deep affinity for her family members, who she had become separated from.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

These profound ties to her family affected her liberation in two interrelated ways. Sebbah's familiarity with her kin helped her reconnect with her uncle, Chief Abdul Lahai Kollokoh after she luckily saw him at the Government Interpreter's House. Kollokoh, of course, promised to return with Sebbah to their family's home village or town. Moreover, the last line of her Remarks column states "she desires to return to her mother in her country,"<sup>76</sup> emphasizing the significance of family relationships for the recently enslaved young girl.

Other runaways who were originally pawned expressed similar sentiments about their fear of continued enslavement and their strong desire to reconnect with their loved ones. These influences, which began when they were first pawned, were fundamental in shaping grievances about slavery and decisions to abscond. The fear of re-enslavement, in particular, was a sentiment that was well-articulated by a subject entered in the Registers of Escaped Slaves on January 26, 1878.<sup>77</sup> A thirty-year-old Kossoh man named Joe Davis had previously been pawned and then enslaved by a British subject named John Davis.<sup>78</sup> While he was processed as a recent runaway in the colony, he explained the very unique circumstances of his bondage under John Davis. First, he revealed that he had fled to Freetown from Tombo Island in French-controlled Guinea. This constituted one of the longest journeys taken by an escaped slave in either of the two Registers. Second, he also disclosed that his former slave master, John Davis, was actually a British subject from the West Indian island and British colony of Antigua. And third, he stated that John Davis had passed away, which eventually led Joe to seek asylum in Freetown.<sup>79</sup> His

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> RES, 1875-1884, p. 50.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

transatlantic and intercolonial story of enslavement and liberation was undoubtedly one of the most unique narratives in the Registers of Escaped Slaves.

However, some parts of his story were similar to other subjects in these logbooks, especially those who lived through pawnship. For instance, Joe provided common and familiar reasoning to explain his flight and urgent plea for sanctuary with the Freetown government. In his Remarks column, colonial scribes emphasized that the former captive was terrified of being re-enslaved by the late John Davis' family members and was therefore seeking protection with the colonial administration.<sup>80</sup> His original conversion from pawn to slave had evidently left its mark on his psyche. Joe's staunch refusal to even risk the chance of being re-enslaved was both a major condemnation of enslaved status and a prime motivator in his quest for self-liberation in the Sierra Leone Colony.

In addition to this outward contempt towards enslavement and the institution of slavery, runaways who were previously victims of pawning also frequently expressed their desire to reunify with their family members. For these individuals, this yearning to seek out their kin or homeland was central in their decision-making and conviction to desert their masters. Reflecting many of the hallmarks of Sebbah's story from earlier, albeit in much less detail, another formerly pawned adolescent strongly expressed his longing to reunite with the family he had been separated from. This male teenager was named Ansurmanah Gberrahe and he was registered as an escaped slave on March 30, 1882.<sup>81</sup> He was listed as fourteen years old and he identified as Temne. According to the fields of his entry in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, this ad was

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

originally pawned by his oldest brother to a slave master that operated in a location along the Little Scarcies River. This owner, who Ansurmanah named as a Santiggy Mormoh, allowed the adolescent to be taken down from the Little Scarcies to Freetown for the purposes of conducting trade.<sup>82</sup>

This trading mission was overseen by Santiggy Mormoh's brother, who brought Ansurmanah to Freetown to sell groundnuts. However, after their arrival, Ansurmanah was determined to remain in the colony, seizing the chance to regain the freedom that had been taken from him. As their trading mission concluded, he refused to leave the city with his master's brother and instead, reported himself as an escaped slave to colonial authorities.<sup>83</sup> His motivation, on one hand, was undoubtedly shaped by his desire to for liberation. But his choice and resolve to abscond was also partially influenced by the young man's profound wish to reunite with his lost family members, which he flatly expressed to colonial officials during his registration. In transcribing Ansurmanah's testimony and dialogue, colonial scribes captured this sentiment by stating, "desires to return to his father at Port Lokkoh by the first safe opportunity."<sup>84</sup>

It is not known if Ansurmanah, or young Sebbah for that matter, successfully found their parents or other kin. Nonetheless, from the fragments of evidence they left behind in the Registers, we are still able to discover their personal and on the ground accounts of pawnship, slavery, and flight. Their recovered experiences illuminate the clear presence of former pawns

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 139-140.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

among the enslaved population of Sierra Leone, particularly male and female minors,<sup>85</sup> while also stressing the centrality of familial memories and connections in shaping the resiliency and actions of bondspeople.

Pawnship in itself was not a form of slave ill treatment in colonial Sierra Leone. But the experience of being pawned, and then converted into a slave, was paramount in shaping individuals' perceptions of enslavement. As scores of former captives expressed in the Register, the very state of being another person's property was a grossly unjust condition that warranted flight. Pawnship amplified this already pointed discontent with slave status. It also heightened fears of re-enslavement. As the case studies in this subsection highlighted, former pawns, most notably children, desperately tried to end their enslavement to reclaim their legal freedom and reunite with the families they had been torn from. This examination of pawnship also brings attention to the deeply unequal power relations that were embedded in society in Sierra Leone, for the free and unfree alike. Since pawns could become slaves, this examination of pawnship underscores the prevalence slavery and the intense suffering it inflicted upon the inhabitants of colonial Sierra Leone and its hinterlands.

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<sup>85</sup> Pawning in colonial Sierra Leone was less prevalent than it was in other areas of colonial Africa. Allen Howard noted that pawning did not become highly intensified in Sierra Leone in the late nineteenth century because the region did not witness widespread food shortages or other natural calamities. But, as Howard mentions, individual families in northwestern Sierra Leone still faced periods of food insecurity. During these trying times, families pledged their children in return for food, such as small quantities of rice. Boys and girls were offered as pledges at about the same rate. Female pawns who were at or near marriageable age were viewed as more secure collateral for creditors because if the pawn's family defaulted, they could easily capitalize on their investment through marriage, either to themselves or another man. Twelve-year-old Sebbah and fourteen-year-old Ansurmah are clear examples of the real children and teenagers who were caught up in these patterns of pawning in late nineteenth century Sierra Leone. Howard, "Pawning in Coastal Northwestern Sierra Leone," p. 268-269, 276.

## *Conclusion*

This analysis of slave mistreatment constitutes the first comprehensive accounting of the precise actions that were interpreted as abuse by enslaved people in the colony of Sierra Leone. Threats of re-sale, starvation, broken promises, physical violence, hard labour, and issues arising from pawning were all distinct categories of mistreatment. Since these forms of ill treatment shaped master-slave relationships, they are strident reminders that slaveholding in this region was indeed more perilous, violent, and unforgiving than previously considered.

While the threat of re-sale was by far the most commonly reported form of slave mistreatment in the Registers of Escaped Slaves, the enslaved had evidently suffered alarming physical abuses. As punishment, or coercion, or simply due to the whims of their masters, slaves were deprived of food for long periods of time, physically confined, overworked and violently beaten. Remarkably, some of the victims of this sort of abuse were able to escape to Freetown, with a few even outlining the severity of their bodily injuries to colonial officials. Violence was a useful tool for owners as they forced slaves to carry out their bidding. But owners also granted promises, rewards, and other benefits to their human property, as was the case in other areas of colonial West Africa and elsewhere. These promises, which in Sierra Leone were typically reassurances from owners that they would not sell a slave's family members, were designed to foster cooperation between slave and master, and ideally improve lives of the enslaved. But, in practice, these rewards were tools of coercion, akin to physical violence, used to leverage the continued loyalty and obedience of slaves. And unfortunately, many masters were quick to break their promises, which enslaved people interpreted as a serious offense and an impetus to abscond. The enslaved population in Sierra Leone was also made up of individuals who were previously pawned, which often occurred during times of great strife or bad fortune. These

former pawns responded to their enslavement with fierce desperation. For them, the state of enslavement was itself an inhumane and unacceptable condition. These individuals deserted their masters to reclaim their freedom and reunite with their families.

Studying the dynamics between masters and slaves, especially patterns of slave mistreatment, is paramount to understand the general nature and conditions of slave societies. This analysis of the Sierra Leone Registers of Escaped Slaves reveals that violence, coercion, and vulnerability were unequivocal factors of enslaved life in late nineteenth century colonial Sierra Leone. These atrocities fundamentally altered the life trajectories of hundreds of enslaved people. Slave masters carried out these actions as strategies to punish, deter, and control their human property. But this mistreatment produced unintended consequences, particularly as slaves interpreted and responded to these abuses in a variety of ways. Mistreatment, in its many different forms, inadvertently heightened the resolve and resiliency of enslaved people. It pushed these captive human beings to desert their former masters, often in groups and with their families, and seek out a better life for themselves. This chapter is not only an account of slave mistreatment but crucially, it also tells the story of the survivors of slavery in the colony of Sierra Leone.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Sierra Leone was originally founded in the late eighteenth century as a settlement for self-emancipated slaves from the American South via Nova Scotia. Situated on a slaving coast at the height of the transatlantic slave trade, the nascent colony at Freetown was planned as a trading post for West African goods, a moral and financial alternative to the evils of the slave trade, and a proud symbol of the British abolitionist cause. After British Parliament outlawed its citizens from partaking in the transatlantic slave trade, Sierra Leone was transformed into the military and judicial headquarters to eradicate the slave trade, which quelled slave exports out of coastal regions of Sierra Leone by the middle of the nineteenth century. But despite decades of anti-slavery campaigning, slavery, slave trading, and systems of enslavement persisted and thrived in the colony for the entire nineteenth century and into 1920s.

Freetown was founded as a sanctuary for formerly enslaved people, but slave owners and their human property regularly operated in the city. Trade in commercial goods at Sierra Leone was meant to underscore the moral and economic ills of trading in human beings. Yet, throughout the nineteenth century, Africans living within or near Sierra Leone were regularly seized, bought, sold, and conveyed into and out of the colony. Countless women, men, and young children fell victim to these practices. The commodities and foodstuff that circulated into the colony at the Freetown Peninsula was often cultivated, made, and/or carried by slaves at the behest of their owners. The anti-slavery experiment at Sierra Leone was entangled in long-established patterns of slavery and slave trading; the colony founded for freed slaves had effectively increased the work of and demand for enslaved people.

Freetown emerged as the major population center in the region by the late nineteenth century. People, produce, meat, and a wide range of commercial products flowed into and out of the city during this period. The colony, which was still primarily centered around Freetown and the Freetown Peninsula, was gradually extending its influence into its coastal and interior hinterlands, leading to the declaration of the Sierra Leone Protectorate in 1896. Even though Sierra Leone was founded nearly a century earlier, during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, it grappled with many of the same challenges of other colonies during the Scramble for Africa. European colonialism was meant to “civilize” Africa, but the economic and political viability of colonial states was dependent upon a notoriously uncivilized practice: slavery. And Sierra Leone was no exception. Successive administrations at Freetown in the late nineteenth century were confounded by the problem of slavery. Like other European-led regimes during the Scramble, many colonial officials overlooked or mischaracterized the harsh realities of enslavement, leaving the responsibility of emancipation in the hands of the slaves themselves.

This dissertation is not a history of the ending of slavery in Sierra Leone. It is a history of the survivors of slavery, especially the brave and lucky few who deserted their owners, evaded re-capture, and lived to voice what had happened to them. These subjects, whose lives were recovered and followed in this dissertation, were not even the last sets of runaway slaves to abscond in colonial Sierra Leone. It is not without irony that the colony founded for freed slaves in 1792 would, only in 1928, be one of the last in the British Empire to formally outlaw the insidious practice. From its origins and up until the 1920s, freedom had unequivocally foundered in Freetown and the Sierra Leone Colony.

This dissertation started in 1875 and concludes in 1894. This time period was significant for a variety of different reasons. Most significantly, it was a timespan that featured the highest

number of documented runaway slave arrivals into Freetown for the entire nineteenth century. The identities and experiences of these self-liberated slaves were recorded into two continuous colonial logbooks: The Sierra Leone Register of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1884 and the Sierra Leone Register of Escaped Slaves for 1885 to 1894. These Registers were the principal sources of this dissertation. They are the longest, most comprehensive documentation on self-liberated slaves in the archival record for Sierra Leone. They are also the only surviving evidence of a consistent and continuous twenty-year colonial policy to passively combat slavery in the colony and its nearby regions.

After runaway slaves were inputted into the Registers, they were officially freed by successive British-led regimes stationed at Freetown. But, the decision and burden of getting to Freetown was placed solely on the enslaved themselves. As shown in this dissertation, this led to 1152 documented slave flights into Freetown between 1875 and 1894 and the arrival of hundreds and maybe even thousands of additional runaway slaves who did not report themselves to colonial authorities. Given the economic and population growth of Freetown in the late nineteenth century and the expanding influence of Britain in the region before and during the Scramble, enslaved people clearly saw the opportunity to seek out better lives for themselves in a growing colonial society. But they had to brave the dangers, uncertainties, and dislocation of flight to do so.

As the introduction of this dissertation outlined, before 1875, colonial policy on the intake and liberation of fugitive slaves was muddled in confusion, contradiction, and inconsistencies. Harboring and freeing runaway slaves jeopardized political and economic alliances with slave-owning African chiefs and headmen who held power in the coastal and interior hinterlands of the colony. At worst, some administrations during the nineteenth century

were unreceptive to the influx of runaways, with some officials even returning captives to their masters. At best, certain governments accommodated runaways, but simply did not maintain a consistent, standardized log of their arrivals or identities. The only analogous listings of runaway slaves show up in colonial reports for parts of 1858 to 1861. Comprehensive, standardized, and regularly kept runaway slave records do not appear in the archival record for Sierra Leone until the first Register of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1884.

Similarly, the decision to end the dissertation in 1894 was related to both changing colonial policy and shifting strategies of slave flight in the late 1890's and into the twentieth century. First, after 1894, British-led administrations at Freetown, especially the regime of Governor Cardew, enacted aggressive policies to combat slave dealing and trafficking in the realms of the colony and its surrounding hinterlands. The passive acceptance and liberation of runaways, which still occurred, was supplemented by more active efforts to eradicate slavery and prosecute the slave traders who upheld the practice. This shift in official policy coincided with the declaration of the Sierra Leone Protectorate in 1896, which itself spurred the arrival and standardized recording of runaways fleeing to British outposts in the Sierra Leonean hinterlands. By the end the nineteenth century, the emancipation of runaway slaves was no longer centralized in Freetown. Therefore, the dissertation's periodization of 1875 to 1894 was significant because it was a high point of runaway slave arrivals into the colony, the last significant period of consistent, but passive, policy measures against slavery, and the final years in which escaped slave arrivals were predominantly concentrated in Freetown.

Since the Registers of Escaped Slaves for 1875 to 1894 were the main source-base of this research, I have chosen to end my study with the story of the last fugitive slave report for 1894. Alpha was a fifteen-year-old Fula and he arrived in Freetown in late December 1894. Like

hundreds of other enslaved women, men and children, young Alpha fled from the Bullom Shore and likely crossed the Sierra Leone River into Freetown via canoe. In the custody of the colonial police, he provided his name, age, gender, ethnicity, and place of enslavement, just as the hundreds of other runaways did before him. He also identified an individual named Carmodia as his former master. In his Remarks column, colonial scribes summarized Alpha's reasoning for absconding slavery, writing only: "Escaped for freedom."<sup>1</sup> He was also taken in front of a Police Magistrate, who recited to him the oath that was read to all the subjects in the Registers: "You have come here and said you have been slaves; here in the Queen's territory every man and woman are free."<sup>2</sup> After being read these words, fifteen year old Alpha was officially liberated from slavery. It is unknown where he resettled in Freetown, or with whom, or if he even remained in the city at all.

The Register of Escaped Slaves for 1885 to 1894 contains what is likely the only surviving historical record of Alpha's life. His entry occupies a single line of text across two pages, which also contains ten other runaway slave entries. In total, less than twenty words are used to capture precisely who he was, what he lived through as a captive, and how he self-liberated from in the hinterlands of this small British colony in West Africa. The entirety of his life was collapsed into less than ten fields of data, featuring single and short phrases that were likely written down in just a few minutes. This short historical record is probably all we will ever know about his life; it is emblematic of the extraordinary utility of the Registers of Escaped Slaves as historical sources and its challenging limitations.

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra Leone Public Archives, Register of Escaped Slaves, 1885-1894, p. 133-134.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., (n.p).

This dissertation was rooted and built around the interpretation of these short but recoverable vignettes of the remarkable lives of formerly enslaved people who lived in Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth century. For Alpha, we have information on his name, age, gender, and ethnicity. We also know, with a high degree of certainty, that in late 1894, he escaped slavery in the Bullom Shore, journeyed across the Sierra Leone River, and declared himself a fugitive slave in the colonial city of Freetown. His entry in the Registers of Escaped Slaves captures his precise migration into the urban space of the colony, as well as the colonial processes he relied on to self-liberate, protect himself from re-enslavement, and presumably integrate into colonial society. His Remarks field, which only stated that he escaped slavery to regain his freedom, is both enlightening and problematic. On one level, it indeed encapsulates Alpha's decision-making and his sharp rebuke of slavery under his former master Carmodia. But, at the same time, "Escaped for Freedom" is imprecise and representative of the vague, formulaic phrases that colonial officials often relied on to fill out bureaucratic documents like the Registers of Escaped Slaves. We are simply left with barely any significant details on the minutia and diversity of Alpha's experiences under slavery, such as his treatment, social networks, labour, and other fundamental elements of enslaved life.

But through digital databasing, close readings, and comparative analyses of all 1152 entries in the Registers, my dissertation showed we can add complexity and magnitude to the brief, singular life histories found within these colonial logbooks. This approach, which uncovered untapped evidence on the distinct identities, daily lives, and collective and unique experiences of former captives, offered new knowledge on the general nature of slavery, patterns of slaveholding, and the broader demographic configurations of the region's enslaved people. In the case of Alpha, there are little specific details on the circumstances of his enslavement,

besides the identity of his owner, place of enslavement, and his desire to be free. But the less than twenty words of text in his entry can be cross-referenced and compared with the nearly 400 pages of 1151 other entries in the Registers. By comparing his case to all others, we can ascertain the range of experiences that he may have lived through, as well as piece together the complexities of the slaveholding systems that shaped his life.

For example, since Alpha's former master, Carmodia, only appears in this one entry, it was likely that he may have been a relatively small-scale slaveholder, especially when contrasted with the owners who were inputted as "former master" for dozens of individual runaways. Moreover, a considerable portion of the Registers' subjects were previously enslaved in the Bullom Shore, just as Alpha was. This is compelling evidence that slavery was indeed widely practiced on the Shore and likely heavily entrenched into the political and socio-economic order of the area. Although Alpha's entry is extremely sparse in terms of detailed biographical data, we can use this comparative analysis to reasonably conclude that he escaped from a society where slavery was highly concentrated. Lastly, since he was a male teenager that was held captive close to Freetown, it was, for instance, equally likely that he carried and vended produce and/or commercial goods for Carmodia, as many male slaves his age were forced to do. This last bit speculation is especially significant because we were left with almost no exact information on his quotidian life as an enslaved person. These interpretations of the last runaway slave case in the Registers exemplify how digital databasing and comparative analysis can be used to study the logbooks' over 1100 total fugitive slave reports.

This methodological approach produced two major results. First, by transcribing, tabulating, and analyzing all the Registers' subjects into computerized databases, I created the first comprehensive accounting of the identities of the enslaved population in colonial Sierra

Leone between 1875 and 1894. From an estimated 220,000 total people said to be enslaved in the region,<sup>3</sup> the Registers of Escaped Slaves contain precise biographical data on the names, genders, ages, and ethnicities of 1152 individuals of this captive population. Hundreds of these former bondspeople were the central characters in this dissertation; their identities and accounts forming the basis and driving force of this new history of enslaved life in the decades leading to up to the twentieth century.

By foregrounding their names and other identifying characteristics, I emphasized how the unique identities of at least some of the region's over 200,000 slaves are indeed recoverable with a high degree of accuracy and at a sufficiently large scale. This methodological approach tackled the inherent anonymity of slavery by recasting the enslaved as real individual human beings, rather than impersonal subjects in the larger socio-economic and political order of the region. Since the Registers were a sample of the total captive population of the colony and its nearby hinterlands, this systematic accounting generated new knowledge on slavery when applied to other demographic categories or fields. By isolating and comparing additional biographical data on gender, age, and ethnicity, for example, this dissertation showed how nearly all demographic cohorts were, to varying degrees, part of the broader enslaved population in Sierra Leone. In other words, slave owners in the region of the colony held males and females, the young and old, and individuals of widely varying ethnic backgrounds. While men outnumbered women, and Temne and Mende were the most enslaved ethnic groups, my tabulation and analysis of the Registers of Escaped Slaves revealed a demographically diverse and ethnically fragmented captive population.

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<sup>3</sup> Allen M. Howard, "Pawning in Coastal Northwest Sierra Leone, 1860-1910," in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 268; John Grace, *Domestic Slavery in West Africa with a Particular Reference to the Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1896-1927* (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1975), p. 169.

Second, my approach was also applicable to the mostly qualitative fields of the Registers, such as the general experiences and movements of the runaways, and the nature of the slaveholding systems they escaped from. Just as I systemically analyzed the demography of this dataset of fugitive slaves, I also identified, sorted, and interpreted their shared, varied, and utterly unique experiences under slavery with considerable precision. The major categories of these findings pertained to the treatment, labour, family ties, decision-making, and migrations of the Registers' subjects. Although most runaway slaves expressed that they had been generally abused by their owners, there were hundreds of other subjects who articulated the exact kind of mistreatment they endured. Likewise, subjects sometimes also recounted the intensity and type of labour they conducted for their owners. This qualitative data provided an opportunity to both highlight the prevalence and locations of hard labour practices in the region and generate a rundown of the various tasks assigned to slaves. The databasing of these runaway slave reports further revealed clusters and networks of runaways who were related by blood and marriage. By cross-referencing entries of these families with, for example, categories of mistreatment, I found that enslaved families were disproportionately targeted with re-sale by their masters. These subjects interpreted the threat of re-sale with grave urgency, often deciding to desert their owners to maintain and secure the unity of their families.

I also tabulated and reconstructed patterns of forced migration through cases of owners taking their slaves to Freetown to conduct trade. In these instances, slaves used their proximity and knowledge of the colonial city to flee and report themselves to the Sierra Leone government. While many runaways were brought into the colony by their masters, more had in fact escaped on their own or in groups from locations near and far from the Freetown Peninsula. By systematically analyzing these locations of enslavement, I not only retraced the journeys of

hundreds of individual runaways at specific points in time, but I also identified the most prevalent slave owners and locations of high slavery in the general area of the colony.

In short, the methodology of my dissertation demonstrates that the identities and indeed experiences of former slaves are indeed recoverable on both micro and macrolevels. I have shown, hundreds of times over, how the Registers of Escaped Slaves can pinpoint the location, experiences, flight, and emancipation of individuals, groups, and entire communities of runaways at exact dates between January 1875 and December 1894. Through comparative analysis, my study charted the prevalence, commonality, and uniqueness of the experiences, relationships, and circumstances that defined the lives of enslaved women, men, and children.

Most of all, this multifaceted exploration of the Registers remedied one of their principal limitations: the problem of brevity. Or, more simply, how does the historian reconstruct and interpret the life histories of subjects whose entire lives were typically folded into less than twenty words in a matted, century old colonial ledger? Sadly, it would impossible to recreate a truly full life history of any of the 1152 people listed in the Registers of Escaped Slaves. But, as this dissertation illustrated, we can use qualitative and quantitative analyses, reasoned speculation, and concrete historical evidence to reconstruct, retrace, and better understand the immense gravity, significance, and complexity of their lives and the world they lived in. As such, the Registers' mostly short, singular life histories, like that of the last runaway Alpha, can be more clearly contextualized and pieced together by the collective migrations, experiences, and actions of the other over 1100 people found in the logbooks.

In this dissertation, I relied on these hundreds of unstudied life histories of former slaves to make new claims about the general conditions and on the ground realities of enslaved life. I asked what can the identities, experiences, movements, and voices of the enslaved tell us about

the systems of slavery in late nineteenth century in Sierra Leone? In addressing this central question, I reassessed earlier generalizations of slaveholding in Sierra Leone as inherently benevolent in nature. From the lives of the former bondspeople in the Registers, I reconsidered the nature of slavery, arguing that slave-master relationships were decidedly more exploitative and more violent than previously realized.

These claims were supported by the range of enslaved experiences that I uncovered in the Registers of Escaped Slaves. In Chapter Three, I analyzed the centrality and manifestations of the most acquisitive element of enslaved life: the work of slaves. In order to underscore the economic underpinnings of slaveholding, I used slaves' accounts of "rigorous servitude" to map and measure the prevalence of hard labour regimes. This analysis produced three major findings. First, small- and large-scale slaveholders implemented excessive labour demands on their captives. Second, enslaved women, men, and children of widely varying ethnicities were all subjected to hard labour by their owners, suggesting that all segments of the enslaved population were overworked. Third, these intense forced labour practices were not geographically isolated. In fact, they were relatively widespread in locations near and far from the colony. Together, these results are compelling evidence that hard labour was a common and likely universal reality of enslavement in Sierra Leone.

In addition to revealing the general intensity of enslaved work, my analysis in Chapter Three also sheds light on the specific tasks and deployment of enslaved women, men, and children in this context. I found conclusive evidence on the utilization of slaves in the colony's agricultural sector, petty commerce, and the trafficking of firewood, gold, and rubber. Using this data, which came from the first-hand accounts of the runaways, I argued that slaves were indeed key strands in the urban, rural, and interregional economies of the colony and its surrounding

regions. In particular, I demonstrated the vital role of slaves in supplying the growing populace of Freetown with food and furnishing the city with essential materials and products. This analysis of slave work also highlighted the movement and spatial presence of individual slaves within the commercial and colonial spaces of the region, underscoring the mobility of enslaved and formerly enslaved people. I uncovered networks of forced and voluntary migrations of enslaved Africans along the long-established waterways and land routes of the Sierra Leone-Guinea commercial system. Slaves were forcibly taken into Freetown by their owners and made to work as the carriers and purveyors of produce, beef, and other commercial goods. From these cases, I was able to conclusively show that slavery persisted in the urban markets *within* Freetown, well over a century after the city was founded as a settlement for freed slaves. And lastly, these forced migrations into Freetown often spurred voluntary migrations as captives strategically relied on knowledge, rumour, and just good luck to find spaces and moments to escape captivity.

Beyond the intensity and variation of the labour conducted by slaves, my study of the Registers also uncovered new perspectives on the treatment of slaves during the late nineteenth century. While many runaways voiced their disdain over the work they conducted for their masters, many more reported the general and specific types of abuse inflicted upon them. In Chapters Four and Five, I relied on these appalling accounts of mistreatment as evidence that slavery in colonial Sierra Leone was in fact more coercive than previously considered. Although most runaway slave entries contained only vague, formulaic phrases, like “escaped on account of ill treatment,” I used close readings of the Registers and digital databasing to identify, catalogue, and analyze the principal forms of abuse suffered by the enslaved population.

The threat of re-sale amounted to the most common and widespread type of mistreatment, serving as a primary reason for slave flight in 250 individual cases. The predominance of the threat of re-sale as a category of mistreatment was, as I argued, linked to active internal slave trades in Sierra Leone during the latter nineteenth century. Masters could easily sell off their captives to other owners. Slaves were aware of these local slave trades and the prospect of life under new owner prompted hundreds of them to immediately abscond. In studying these cases of re-sale, I made two major findings. First, masters routinely weaponized the threat of re-sale as a strategy to punish slaves for minor and major acts of insubordination. Second, my analysis revealed that enslaved families were disproportionately targeted with re-sale by their owners. The mere chance of being torn from their loved ones in fact prompted dozens of captives to run away with their spouses, children, and other kin. This aspect of the dissertation emphasized the importance of family unity in the shaping of the experiences under slavery.

Chapter Five offered more compelling evidence that enslaved life in Sierra Leone was indeed defined by violence and coercion. Continuing my analysis of slave mistreatment, I identified and explored the occurrence and frequency of other kinds of abuse, such as food deprivation, hard labour, broken promises, physical abuse, and issues stemming from pawnship. My findings emphatically confirmed that the enslaved were starved, overworked, confined, and violently assaulted by their slave owners. Overall, my research findings in Chapters Three, Four, and Five serve as a collective and powerful counterpoint to the notion that African slavery was a relatively mild and mostly benevolent institution. From the blood and sweat of the real people who survived slavery, my dissertation completely redefines slavery in Sierra Leone by emphasizing the inherent exploitation, oppression, and raw violence that upheld it.

This dissertation created a new history of slavery in the British colony of Sierra Leone from the experiences, relationships, displacement, and untold suffering and resiliency of the real people who survived the inhumane practice. Alpha, the fifteen-year-old Fula who was the last documented runaway in the Registers, did not deliver the final and deciding blow to end slavery in Sierra Leone. History usually doesn't work out that way. But his life story carries immense magnitude, even though we have less than twenty words on who he was and what he lived through. His short entry told us how a singular teenager navigated the physical and legal terrains of slavery and colonialism in Sierra Leone at end of the nineteenth century. It even allowed us to pinpoint the very day, month, and year that he regained his freedom in the colony. Most of all, his life story is important because it is one of over 1100 that can be recovered in the frayed and decaying pages of the Registers of Escaped Slaves. These rare and unstudied listings convey the real pain, oppression, and dislocation that was lived and endured by enslaved people during a period of historical change. In reconstructing Alpha's life history, along with the stories of hundreds of others, this dissertation exemplified how historians can draw on creative, diverse, and rigorous methods to piece together the complex and meaningful lives of historical subjects who left behind little archival evidence. And most importantly, the hundreds of stories of runaway slaves that make up this dissertation are powerful reminders of the people, experiences, and distinctly human costs of the histories of slavery, freedom, and colonialism in late nineteenth century Africa.

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