ABOLITION IN SIERRA LEONE

Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth-Century West Africa.
By Richard Peter Anderson.
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KEY WORDS: Sierra Leone, West Africa, slavery abolition, missionaries, diaspora, identity, Islam.

In the context of the campaign against the slave trade and slavery during the second half of the eighteenth century, the early history of the 'founding' of Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone, has been well documented.[1] Typically, scholars have focused on the first three groups of repatriated freed Black slaves — the so-called Black Poor from England, the Black Loyalists from Nova Scotia, and the Maroons from Jamaica — who, between 1787 and 1801, settled in what became the British crown colony of Freetown in 1808. Departing from the orthodox narrative about the nascent settlement (also named the 'Province of Freedom' by the abolitionist Granville Sharp), Richard Anderson's *Abolition in Sierra Leone* provides a different and compelling exposé. Anderson contends that 'the earliest settlers have been privileged in Sierra Leone historiography to an extent that far outweighs their demographic and cultural influence' (29). Thus, the study spotlights the lived experiences of freed slaves 'known first as Captured Negroes, and after 1821 as Liberated Africans', who gained emancipation through Freetown's Vice-Admiralty Court and Courts of Mixed Commission (2).

After Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807, Freetown served as a base for the British Royal Navy stationed in West Africa to intercept slave vessels bound for the Americas across the Atlantic Ocean. Additionally, the colony became a springboard for European evangelical protestant missionaries and their African pastors to spread Christianity to the rest of West Africa. In this context, Anderson's monograph explores 'how Africans, forcibly removed from their homelands, rebuilt new lives, communities, and collective identities in an early British colony in Africa' (4). Significantly, unlike the earlier three groups of Black ex-slaves repatriated from Europe and the Americas, 'all Liberated Africans were born in Africa and thus provide an African perspective on the responses to emancipation and the meaning of "liberation"' (4). Yet the path to liberation could be uncertain, as Anderson observes: 'Interception [by the British] was at once a moment of rescue from New World slavery, but also at times the unintended catalyst of mass killing at sea' (77).

An outgrowth of doctoral dissertation research that Anderson carried out at Yale University, *Abolition in Sierra Leone* is based on sources from multiple archives and libraries in Sierra Leone, Canada, the United States, England, and Brazil. Among the diverse source materials Anderson draws on for his study are Christian missionary records, correspondence, narratives of captives, Colonial Office papers, Foreign Office papers, High Court of Admiralty papers, and Liberated African Department letter books, among others.

1 See, for example, C. Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London, 1962); J. Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787–1870* (Evanston, IL, 1969).

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Published contemporary sources, including the newspapers *Sierra Leone Church Times* and *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, and the *Church Missionary Society Annual Reports* supplement the archival sources. As Anderson himself points out, 'Sierra Leone sources allow a study of people's regional origins and often the[ir] specific home states, towns, or even villages' (6). More importantly, he adds, 'this level of detail in tracing origins allows an examination of the processes of identity formation among different cohorts of Liberated Africans during fifty-six years of settlement' (6). The rich trove of both primary and secondary sources is an impressive attribute of *Abolition in Sierra Leone,* to which Anderson brings his nuanced and careful interpretation and analysis.

To illustrate the abovementioned point, it is worth considering Anderson's approach by focusing on the last chapter, Chapter Seven, 'The Cobolo War: Islam, identity, and resistance'. In discussing religious identity and plurality in Freetown, Anderson observes: 'The Sierra Leone peninsula was . . . a meeting point of two internal African diasporas: Muslim traders extending their economic and educational networks and Muslims from the Bight of Benin and Upper Guinea who reached the colony's shores on intercepted slave vessels' (231). Like other recent studies on nineteenth-century Freetown by Gibril Cole and Joseph Bangura, for example, Anderson affirms the ethnic heterogeneity and religious diversity of the colonial enclave.[2] Anderson places that dynamic in a wider comparative perspective, remarking: 'Much like nineteenth-century Bahia, Sierra Leone became a diaspora in which Islam not only persisted but found new converts' (231). It is not surprising then that British missionaries and colonial officials were apprehensive about Islamic influence in a settlement they had envisioned as a Christian colony. The so-called Cobolo War of 1832 refers to a violent struggle between a group of Yoruba and Muslim Liberated Africans and British officials at Waterloo, in the eastern outskirts of Freetown. Anderson concludes that the alleged rebels had constructed 'a community of escape, rather than an encampment for attack'. In this sense, the conflict and its protagonists were 'more analogous to fugitive communities of *quilombos* and *mocambos* in Brazil and *palenques* in Cuba' (239).

Overall, *Abolition in Sierra Leone* is a refreshing monograph that offers a detailed investigation into the complexity and fluidity of identity formation among a diasporic community often taken for granted, or not given its due, in scholarly studies on nineteenth-century Sierra Leone. Anderson's breakdown of the ethnic origins, names, and settlement patterns of the Liberated Africans in Freetown illuminates the diversity of the community, which, together with the earlier incomers and nearby indigenous groups, morphed into the Krio, one of contemporary Sierra Leone's ethnic and cultural groups. But the absence of a gendered dimension to Anderson's study, in which women feature as a collective vis-à-vis men, should make *Abolition in Sierra Leone* a starting point for future research on how gender played out in the complex nature of identity formation in nineteenth-century Freetown — and, by extension, the rest of Sierra Leone. Of course, this point by no means detracts from the meticulous work Anderson has done to bring Liberated

2 G. R. Cole, *The Krio of West Africa: Islam, Culture, Creolization and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH, 2013); J. J. Bangura, *The Temne of Sierra Leone: African Agency in the Making of a British Colony* (Cambridge, 2017).

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Africans to the center stage of studies on diasporic communities in the Atlantic World and in Sierra Leone's historiography.

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WOMEN HIGHLIFE PERFORMERS IN GHANA

Female Highlife Performers in Ghana: Expression, Resistance, and Advocacy.
By Nana Abena Amoah-Ramey.
New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. Pp. 192. $90.00, hardcover (ISBN: 978-1-4985-6466-3); $85.50, e-book (ISBN: 978-1-4985-6467-0).
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KEY WORDS: Ghana, music, popular culture, gender, women.

When Akan rhythms, dances, and folks sound blended with the brass instruments and guitars of West African and Caribbean sailors, highlife music was born in the Gold Coast. A growing scholarship on highlife music attends to the genre's syncretic origins and continental popularity, but Nana Amoah-Ramey's book challenges academic androcentricity with a genealogy of women highlife performers in the twentieth century. With attention to highlife as both an artistic profession and subject of study, Amoah-Ramey considers how women performers navigated male dominance in the field, as well as the respectability politics that suffused daily life. With theoretical frameworks in Black feminist thought and standpoint epistemologies, Amoah-Ramey uses oral histories of women performers to create a scholarly archive of female performers of highlife music.

Highlife's origins can be traced to the interactions of colonial troops stationed in the Gold Coast during the interwar period. Indeed, one of the most persuasive arguments that Amoah-Ramey makes is to situate highlife's patriliny in its syncretic but militarized past. In traditional Akan dances and songs, women are prominent performers and lyricists, especially during puberty rites and ceremonies. Once these songs were mixed with regimented brass bands composed by European-trained musicians, women performers were excluded and, until the 1970s, female impersonators performed women's roles. Amoah-Ramey does not explain how women dancers and vocalists emerged at that point in highlife music, but suggests that the change reflects a flourishing of women's activism after President Nkrumah's inauguration of the National Council of Ghana Women. As highlife grew through town-based bands and vocal dance groups, it reached its most popular height in the 1970s. The 'Queens of Highlife' gained prominence just ahead of the genre's decline in the 1980s, when the Rawlings regime imposed nightly curfews and a tax on imported instruments, which instigated a musical recession.

In Chapters Two through Four, Amoah-Ramey details the effervescence of early independence, the festivity associated with highlife's popularity, and the role of apprenticeships in the cultivation of new musical talent. With attention to the narratives of twenty women highlife performers, Amoah-Ramey addresses issues of gender disparities in a strong effort

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