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# Localizing the Narrative: The Representation of the Slave Trade and Enslavement Within Nigerian Museums

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the interpretation and presentation of the transatlantic slave trade in Nigerian museums. It focuses on two contrasting case studies, namely the government-funded Slave History Museum (Calabar) and the privately run Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum (Badagry). To investigate the complex and conflicting national and local narrative frameworks by which the slave trade and enslavement are presented to the public, this study focuses on qualitative content analysis of museum displays in addition to visitor observations. Comparative analysis of these museums suggests that this historically complex and emotional heritage cannot be understood in isolation from wider local, national, or global narratives. The paper explores the importance of taking a humanizing and empathetic approach to the presentation of the transatlantic slave trade in museums. I also consider how future practice might include ideas of localization and personalization to decolonize "official" slave trade heritage narratives in Nigeria and beyond.

**KEYWORDS**

Museums; slavery; Nigeria; heritage; transatlantic slave trade; localization; decolonization; descendant communities

## Introduction

The presentation of enslavement and the slave trade in Nigeria mirrors its treatment in much of the rest of the world in its marked absence from museums and heritage sites not directly linked to the slave trade (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 1). The absence of narratives about the slave trade and enslavement in non-specific national and regional museums in Nigeria could potentially be linked to colonial legacies and rhetoric urging Nigerians to "forget" such dark historical chapters. Partly due to such absences, the transatlantic slave trade's lack of incorporation in dominant public heritage practice has resulted in it being an underrepresented area of study in Nigeria.

Until recently, the transatlantic slave trade was most often presented in museums located at sites along the slave route or otherwise associated with enslavement, including those in the United Kingdom, the United States, the Caribbean, and France. Additionally, there were sometimes specific exhibitions or displays within non-specific local or specialist museums, for example the "London, Sugar and Slavery" exhibition at Museum of

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London Docklands (UK); similarly, exhibits about slavery and the slave trade have been developed at the Nantes History Museum (France), the Barbados Museum (Barbados), and the Library of Congress (US). Few countries, including Nigeria, have sought to present the slave trade and enslavement within wider local, national, and temporal contexts and cultures. Rather, slavery has been most often treated in isolation, as a special topic. This approach is, however, now being increasingly challenged, for example by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (US), which opened in 2016.

Efforts to interpret the "difficult heritage" (Macdonald 2009) of transatlantic slavery have been defined by two key global trends over the last few decades. The first has been to open museums specifically dedicated to the topic of transatlantic slavery, including the National Museum on Slavery and Freedom, Cape Coast (Ghana, due to open in 2022), the International Slavery Museum, Liverpool (UK), and the Old Slave Mart Museum, Charleston (US). Nigerian museums have followed this pattern, with the topic presented in separate spaces away from national and state museums. For example in the states of Calabar and Lagos, despite there being existing national and state museums, two distinct "slave trade" museums have been established by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM): The Slave Trade Museum in Calabar and Badagry Heritage Museum in Lagos State.

The second global trend has been the establishment of museums at former slave trade heritage sites (Eichstedt and Small 2002), including the Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum (Nigeria), Cape Coast Castle (Ghana), Thomas Jefferson's Monticello (US), Royall House and Slave Quarters (US), Neron (Guadeloupe), and Angerona Coffee Plantation (Havana). Museums have been established in enslavers' residences, at plantations, in slave cells, and at slave markets. Museums at such heritage sites frequently focus on themes of the economics of slavery, the life of slave owners, and the relationships of those enslaved to their enslavers. Many of these sites are also places of "national" memory; for example, Jefferson's Monticello and George Washington's Mount Vernon have a particular and powerful resonance for Americans as the homes of the most celebrated of their nation's "Founding Fathers" (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 170). Yet, despite the potential of these grand cultural and national heritage sites to challenge visitors with uncomfortable truths, many of them have not engaged the more diverse narratives that can humanize those enslaved (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 105; Apoh, Anquandah, and Amenyo-Xa 2018). On the contrary, as suggested by Eichstedt and Small's study of plantation museums in the southern United States, such institutions may symbolically annihilate, erase, or trivialize the emotive narratives of their many enslaved occupants (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 105).

These two primary trends – (1) the established of specific museums dedicated to slavery and (2) the use of slave heritage sites as museums – have not been without critique, including by descendent communities. Frequently, these approaches have failed to convey a complete and complex picture, instead framing slavery in isolation, as a special topic, rather than as integral to local, national, and international histories. Museums also have been criticized for offering passive and emotionally removed snapshots of the slave trade or of specific enslaved individuals at specific times and places; these approaches can create a "collapse of time" and suggest that slavery was a temporally singular event (Croucher 2015; Eichstedt and Small 2002, 147). Globally, the presentation

of slave trade has been problematic; museums have failed to present the full human story of enslavement, including its impact locally on the culture and identity of those individual and communities enslaved as well as those doing the enslaving (Fabian 2013; Croucher 2015; Eichstedt and Small 2002).

## Nigeria museums and slave trade

Prior to the arrival of European slave traders and the creation of the transatlantic trade route in the sixteenth century, the enslavement of people in West Africa occurred as a practice of power, control, and subjugation inflicted by certain ethnic groups on their less powerful and conquered rivals (Davidson 1965; Davis 2003). To put this into context, before what would become the modern nations of West Africa were drawn on a map by European powers – a callous process that began at the Berlin Conference in 1884 – this region was made up by a vast patchwork of ethnic groups, states, and empires, including Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Asante, Dahomey, Borgu, Oyo, Benin, and Kanem-Bornu. Each had different beliefs, traditions, and languages (Anstey 1975; Bradley and Cartledge 2011; Fadipe 2010; Klein 2010). Nigeria was first established as two protectorates, in the north and south, and then as a single colony under British rule in 1914. It is estimated that today there are over 200 different ethnic groups within Nigeria (Falola and Heaton 2014, 4). This ethnic diversity is important to understanding the history of slavery in West Africa both before and during European involvement. The established pattern of rival ethnic groups' enslavement of each other acted as a supporting mechanism for the success of the later European commercially motivated transatlantic slave trade (Davidson 1965, 194–195; Fadipe 2010). For example, in Calabar, European slave traders' relationships with the area's dominant group, the Efik, enabled them to source captives through Efik middle men, who raided rival neighboring groups for people to exchange and enslave (Imbua 2013).

In 1943, under British colonial rule, the Nigerian Antiquities Service was established by Kenneth Murray, the first Surveyor of Antiquities in Nigeria; this institution was renamed the National Commission for Museums and Monuments or the NCMM following Nigeria's independence (Eluyemi 2002, 5; Dike 1982). It was Murray's collection of Esie Soap Stone figures that formed the basis for the first museum in Esie in 1945 (Fagg 1977). The 1950s (what would be the final decade of colonial rule) saw the growth of museums in Nigeria, including new institutions established in Jos (1954), Lagos (1957), Ouse (1958), Benin (1959), and Kano (1960) (Eluyemi 2002, 7). These museums sought to preserve, secure, and house Nigeria's past as revealed by archaeology; they also displayed what were deemed the most important and representative archaeological, historical, and artistic artifacts to the public (Fagg 1977; Eluyemi 2002, 7).

It is clear, then, that many of the dominant heritage narratives still resonant in Nigeria can be traced to the actions of white colonists through the establishment of museums and the official recognition of particular heritage sites under British rule (Aleru et al. 2019, 75; Eluyemi 2002, 7; Eze-Uzomaka 2001). Following independence in 1960, efforts to define Nigeria's heritage and past became a mechanism that served to enlighten and educate the public in national "official" heritage rhetoric and to help build a nation (Eluyemi 2002, 7). Perhaps this history indicates why the transatlantic slave trade is, for the most part, still excluded from wider narratives of independence, colonial geography, and ethnic

histories in Nigerian museums. For example, the National Museum in Lagos does not include the transatlantic slave trade in its presentation of the history and heritage of West Africa and Nigeria, despite tackling other culturally sensitive topics such as female genital mutilation and infanticide. Yet, despite this silence, the history of slavery and its accompanying acts of oppression and injustice are at the heart of Nigerian heritage and local cultural narratives.

Nigerian museums created under colonialism and sustained in independence were fundamentally built on western ideas of culture. That is, their presentations and collections were not typically grounded in an understanding of what the ethnically diverse "publics" of Nigeria regarded as relevant or important (Eluyemi 2002). Resultantly, even some sixty years after independence, some Nigerians still view official museums as elitist and foreign (Eluyemi 2002, 7; Eze-Uzomaka 2001). Furthermore, certain ethnic groups have been religiously and culturally opposed to the creation of museums. These critics regard the presentation and collection of religious and cultural items in museums as creating false idols; through the idolization of the past and the removal of sacred items from cultural practice, a museum could essentially become a "house of fetish where idols kept there wreak vengeance on museum staff who are starving them of the attention of their devotees" (Eluyemi 2002, 7).

Subsequently, despite high investment in "official" national museums and heritage sites, museums factor little into most Nigerians' experience and understanding of their nation's past. Colonial legacies have thwarted the use and impact of national museums to this day; a fundamental problem is that Nigerian heritage has been framed in ways that alienate or disinterest many Nigerians (Aleru et al. 2019, 74; Eze-Uzomaka 2001). Indeed, in a study around the turn of the twenty-first century, some 75% of surveyed Nigerians who heard the word "museum" had no idea of its meaning and 95% of respondents had never visited a museum (Eluyemi 2002, 7). This is not to say, of course, that Nigerians have no sustained interest in their past. On the contrary, the "official" heritage offered up in national museums sometimes has been countered with localized discourses (Aleru et al. 2019). Some areas have created their own locally managed museums to present *their* story of the past. For example, in Badagry, a separate and independently run museum has been created at the slave cells of colonial-era "Paramount Ruler" and slave merchant Seriki Williams Abass; this on-site museum counters the Badagry Heritage Museum's more "official" narrative.

Despite such attempts at localization, it is nonetheless clear that the heritage sector in Nigeria lacks the financial support and public awareness needed for adequate investment in the nation's museums and heritage sites. On the whole, the public does not view "official" tangible heritage in Nigeria as an economic, social, or cultural asset. As such, heritage sites and museums are under constant threat from looting or development; for example, in Badagry, only one of the four former slave cells of Seriki Williams Abass remains; the rest have been destroyed for commercial development (Eluyemi 2002, 8, 12). The risk that heritage sites face from development is exacerbated by Nigeria having little to no commercial heritage sector, no mitigation plan for development at many heritage sites, and no "the developer pays" ethos. Nor is there a thriving heritage tourist economy; in part, this is due to issues with infrastructure and security surrounding both domestic and international tourism at such sites (Eyo 1998).

The management of heritage in Nigeria is also stymied by the siloing of heritage workers into three seemingly separate institutional entities. First, at the federal level, there is the National Commission for Museums and Monuments or NCMM, which has its roots in the colonial-era Nigerian Antiquities Service. The NCMM is in charge of national heritage sites and museums; it acts as an administrative body with the objective of museum-based education. The Director General of the NCMM and museum curators are administrative (and often political) roles; appointees are selected by the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture or the central government. Since individuals are governmentally selected and there is not at present a central curatorial training program, curators can potentially lack the relevant training or skills to conserve, preserve, and present heritage. This skills deficit is particularly problematic in relation to emotionally charged histories, such as the slave trade. Resultantly, exhibitions such as those at the Slave Trade Museum in Calabar have the potential to become politically manipulated; that is, histories of the slave trade may be shaped to promote the history of those in power rather than more localized and diverse narratives about the topic. Second, state-run university archaeology departments, including those at Ibadan and Jos, aim to educate and train future heritage professionals. However, many of those who receive this specialist education will not end up working in the heritage sector due to lack of employment opportunities. Third, there is localized heritage, which is owned and managed by local communities. Heritage as practiced at the federal, academic, and local levels rarely converges, often serving different audiences and having conflicting agendas.

Both the protection and presentation of "official" heritage in Nigeria today remain entrenched in colonial legacy. National rhetoric regarding the slave trade and enslavement often excludes certain narratives, and the heritage of the slave trade is either deliberately not protected or subconsciously overlooked. However intentional or unintentional such disregard is, the effect is the same: continued narratives that memorialize colonial rule and its role in "discovering" West African civilizations and creating "Nigeria"; at the same times, these narratives minimize attention to ethically and morally abhorrent dark pasts (Croucher 2015, 353, 362). We should remember that the heritage first collected and presented in Nigerian museums was created by white colonists and often intended for consumption by other white Europeans. Within this colonial context, there was little understanding of the diverse ethnic communities in Nigeria; this lack of understanding extended to colonists' view of tangible vs. intangible heritage, as well as the localized impacts and narratives of the transatlantic slave trade (Croucher 2015, 362). As a result, the act of creating museums in Nigeria was a process, replicated globally, of racism (Eichstedt and Small 2002; Fabian 2013). This article analyzes official heritage narratives of the transatlantic slave trade in Nigerian museums and critically considers if alternative local "counter" dialogues provide a more accessible, accurate, and culturally aware approach to the presentation of transatlantic slavery (Fennell 2015; Fabian 2013).

## Method

This research project involved qualitative content analysis at two contrasting Nigerian museums focusing on the transatlantic slave trade: the Slave Trade Museum (Calabar),

a museum created and managed by the government's National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), and the Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum (Badagry), a National Monument that is locally managed. I visited these sites in early 2018 and analyzed the narrative content of museum displays, guided tours, and associated textual sources including guidebooks; I additionally observed visitors engage with the tours and displays. It is worth noting that I entered these spaces as a white British woman, which is likely to have impacted the narratives presented to me by tour guides. My analysis applied a grounded theory approach, in which data collection preceded any theorizing. The ultimate aim was to deconstruct the official and unofficial heritage narratives that Nigerian museums have used to present the transatlantic slave trade to the public. I also sought to understand the impact of contrasting and conflicting narratives on the visitors' understanding of and connection to this topic. Critically, in theorizing out from this local data, I explored how these case studies could offer alternative global frameworks for the presentation of the transatlantic slave trade elsewhere.

## Calabar

Calabar is a city located in southeastern Nigeria, in Cross River State. It is located near the Calabar River and the Cross River Delta; this area is referred to as the Bight of Biafra or, officially, the Bight of Bonny (Imbua 2013). The current political structure of the city is based on a tripartite model of governance, with the three major ethnic groups within Calabar (the Qua, Efut, and Efik) represented and each having their own authority over specific areas that form part of Calabar's larger metropolis (NCMM 2005, 1). Each of these three groups has its own head: the Obong for the Efik, Ndidem for the Quas, and Muri Munene for the Efut (NCMM 2005, 1; Imbua 2013).

European traders, travelers, and explorers were active in the area starting in the fifteenth century (Imbua 2013; NCMM 2005, 1). Portuguese involvement in the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra, including Calabar, began during the sixteenth century and continued on until the British took over in the late seventeenth century (Imbua 2013; NCMM 2005). By the eighteenth century, Calabar had become an important slave trading port. It is estimated that over 1.5 million enslaved people were transported from the Bight of Biafra to the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, many of them throughout Old Calabar itself (Lovejoy and Richardson 1999, 337; NCMM 2005, 1). The transatlantic slave trade in Calabar finally collapsed in 1840 following a decline that British Abolition in 1807 had accelerated (Lovejoy and Richardson 1999, 337).

### *The Slave History Museum*

The Slave History Museum at Calabar is situated at Calabar docks, within the modern development of Marina Beach. The modern leisure and tourist development of Marina Beach, like Calabar more generally, has suffered economically over the last decade in part due to failing tourism and lack of government investment. Resultantly, most of Marina Beach is now disused and semi-derelict; the hotel, cinema, and fairground have closed down. At the time of my visit in 2018, only the museum and a single bar remained operational in the development.

The Slave History Museum opened in 2005, with the aim of "bring[ing] the memories of this tragic enterprise [of the transatlantic slave trade] to a larger audience" (Imbua 2013, 112, 113). The museum was founded by the Cross River State government in an effort to boost tourism in the area, and it is managed by the NCMM, which provides funding to maintain the building and staff. In addition to state and federal funding, entrance fees and private donations support the museum's maintenance and the preservation and conservation of the museum's historical material. The museum is additionally associated with the "Slavery and Remembrance Project," a jointly sponsored endeavor launched in 2014 between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Slave Route Project and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (US). This project's website (slaveryandremembrance.org) enabled partnering organizations, such as the Slave History Museum, to provide online resources and information relating to their site. The broader intention of the Slavery and Remembrance Project is to tell the story of the creation and evolution of the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, and legacies of slavery through an online platform. It champions a multi-vocal approach to memorialization, since the complexity of the subject matter necessitates "multiple perspectives, methodologies, and interpretations – it is, in short, many stories" (slaveryandremembrance.org/about/voices/). The website's content encompasses diverse objects, museum exhibits, and historical sites (www.slaveryandrememberance.org). However, this content is not at present moderated, and the factual accuracy of some posted information has not been vetted. For example, the Slave History Museum's own web page states that it is situated "on the site of a fifteenth-century slave-trading warehouse in Marina Beach," yet these claims have not been substantiated with evidence.

I visited Calabar's Slave History Museum (Figure 1) in May 2018. The external facade of the museum includes a bronze frieze of images of enslaved figures weighed down with shackles. Although entrance fees were clearly displayed, I was asked by staff to pay an additional fee to cover the cost of the electricity "to enable the lights to be turned on" as well as further fees for the tour guide. The lights were already on upon my arrival

**Figure 1.** The external facade of the Slave History Museum at Calabar, 2018. Photograph by author.

to the museum, as a primary school group of approximately twenty children was inside. The tour guide confirmed to me that these were local schoolchildren and that Nigerian students represented the demographic majority of visitors to the museum. The entrance hallway contained two display boards: first, a basic map of the triangular trade (Figure 2) and, second, an introductory board which presented photographs and drawings of enslaved individuals and a brief textual panel summarizing the aims of the museum.

The museum contained three permanent exhibitions, which for visitors began with the Slavery Exhibition, followed by the Slavery Diorama Exhibition, and then ended with Nigeria's Ancient Art and Traditions Exhibition. The material basis for the museum and its exhibitions encompassed contemporary and historical objects, archival documents and photographs, as well as maps and biographies of the enslaved, enslavers, and local auxiliaries (Imbua 2013, 112).

### *Slavery Exhibition*

The narrative of the main gallery's "Slavery Exhibition" is centered on the story of the slave trade in Calabar. It uses primary historical documents to present evidence to demonstrate the impact of slavery on Calabar. The exhibition also encompasses a broader world perspective and includes information on key global figures in both the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition. Incorporated within the center of this space is the presentation of "relics of the slave trade in Calabar." This object-focused exhibit presents historical items like guns, shackles, chains, and cowries to illustrate processes of capture, subjugation, and exchange. While the "Slavery Exhibition" is meant to begin with the audiovisual introduction "The Story of Pre-Atlantic Slavery," this presentation was inoperative at the time of my visit and, according to the tour guide, there was some question of when funds would be available to replace or fix it. According to information provided by the tour guide, this presentation provided an important starting point and foundation of knowledge for visitors, including the region's history prior to the transatlantic slavery trade. Lacking this introduction, my tour began by entering a


**Figure 2.** The triangular trade route display board inside the Slave History Museum at Calabar, 2018. Photograph by author.

dark room, the focus of which is a large, approximately ten meters by five meters, not-to-size reconstruction of a slave transportation ship, which stands alone. The reconstructed ship, has a section of exterior cut away in the middle, which enables the visitor to see inside the ship and to view a mannequin depiction of enslaved individuals laying down tightly packed together. There is also a textual display on the opposite wall entitled "Transatlantic Passage and its Problems." The display briefly described the conditions of ships in which "slaves were crowded together under horrible conditions that resulted in the death of many." This placard also presented other factual information about the Middle Passage, for example the number of people transported within the type of ship displayed and how many days the passage lasted. The tour guide's explanation focused on similar information about the reconstructed ship; for example, we were told how enslaved captives were packed and shipped as cargo, how these captives were fed during the voyage, and other details about the conditions of their long journey.

Exiting the ship room, visitors next entered a display cabinet exhibition space also focused on the slave trade and slavery. The key narrative themes named in the space were, to quote exactly, Manilla (Bangles): The Currency for Exchange; Procurement of Slaves; Exchange and Items of Exchange; Slave Markets and Auctioning; Shackles and Branding; Facilitators of The Trade; Industry and Slave Employment; Slave Representation: Objects and Representations of Africans in the New World; Resistance and Punishment; Abolitionists; Books and Documents; Integration. Many of themes represent normative narrative frameworks for the presentation of slave trade and enslavement. That is, currency, procurement, captivity, industry, and abolition are in focus at many heritage settings along the transatlantic slave route. Indeed, similar themes were represented in at the Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum in Badagry. At the Slave History Museum, each of these themes was presented in a space that was separate and clearly delineated from other themes. Most often, a theme would be presented in a specific glass case or, alternately, via a series of wall-based panels with photographs or text. The glass cases contained some historical and archival items, and these were often associated with brief written descriptions, for example "Shackles used on slave feet." The wall-based panels offered a similarly limited amount of information and were mostly passive in their narrative format, for example, a photograph of Akpabuyo Market was accompanied by the short description "Known locally as Esuk Mba Market still practices trade by barter." These cases and wall panels together presented a version of slavery that was sanitized and distant; the exhibition did not personalize or humanize the past, nor did it actively encourage visitors to empathize with the enslaved. For example, though the exhibition included names of some abolitionists, those enslaved and those left behind remained anonymous and nameless.

The final theme of the gallery was "assimilation." In the exhibit, assimilation was used essentially as a synonym for westernization and was presented in a highly sanitized manner. Assimilation was represented through photographs of Nigerians wearing western clothing and of a couple getting married. There was an additional emphasis on the use of objects, such as imported pottery, associated with Europe. This passive and overly simple narrative failed to represent the complex and conflicting local, personal, and emotive human impacts of the slave trade. That is, the exhibit did not challenge visitors to consider the dark side of "assimilation," including oppression, exploitation, and dehumanization – all of which were purported to be key themes for

the museum. This final gallery theme has much greater interpretive potential to reframe the dialogue; it could draw visitors into discussion regarding the continued local and global impacts of the enslavement of millions of West Africans on contemporary culture. It was only with the tour guides' explanation that some of this potential was realized and the discourse was reframed, humanized, and personalized. A tour guide wryly noted, "When white and Black people marry, that's assimilation." Further comments explicitly identified the connection to slavery: "Want to be freed? Then you have to assimilate."

Little in the physical exhibit on assimilation encouraged visitors' active engagement with the museum's overarching themes of oppression or exploitation. In this static exhibition, tour guides' explanations were thus particularly invaluable. As members of local communities, the guides presented narratives linking the assimilation exhibition to contemporary culture. They offered a personal view of the past, which was observationally relatable to many of the visitors and encouraged discussion. While the interventions I observed were largely successful, relying on a rotating cast of guides rather than the physical exhibit may undermine the tour's consistency and accuracy over time.

### *Slavery Diorama Exhibition: "Final Destination"*

The Slavery Diorama Exhibition entrance was accessed via a door from the preceding Slavery Exhibition; this door leads visitors into a dark corridor. Tour guides explained that the darkness, which is purposeful, represented the "dark era" of the slave trade and slavery. The diorama gallery as a whole was a highly emotive experience; indeed, a group of primary school children were visibly scared upon entering. Besides the darkness, recordings of sounds, including those of people screaming, undoubtedly contributed to these visitors' sense of fear. This exhibition's environment was a stark contrast from the preceding Slavery Exhibition, which was light, airy, and spacious. The darkness was a key component of the exhibit's sense of unease and foreboding. Following a twisting path, visitors could not see each diorama display until it was directly in front on them; as such, visitors were never sure what was coming next. The limited audio material and general lack of signage required visitors, as they negotiated the dioramas, to be reliant on tour guides' interpretations.

There were eight key diorama display spaces. Each represented a specific narrative and each was situated in a separate room off the main dark gallery path. Each display recreated a historical scene related to the slave trade and enslavement using static wax figures, background painting, audio material, and lighting. The eight key display narrative spaces were:

(1) *Capture:* This display presented two wax Black figures, who the tour guide noted were "supposed to represent West Africans," being held in a walled area. The figures were presented as lamenting through song, with background audio of wailing and crying about being caught. The audio also included a song, presumably sung by the captives, about being told they were going to be farmers in a better place.
(2) *Selling:* This scene was set in what appeared to be an American slave market. Wax figures of enslaved West African captives were positioned in place with white

female and male enslavers. The audio in this exhibit worked to evoke the sense of humiliation and disorientation captives would have felt in the slave market. Overlapping voices with European and American accents made derogatory comments (including "like monkey") and bartered ("five … seven … sold at ten pounds").

(3) *Branding:* This scene used wax figures to depict Black slaves being branded by a white male enslaver with a hot knife. There was no audio material included with this display, and the guide also made no comment during my tour.

(4) *Cotton Fields*: This exhibit presented wax figures of enslaved Black men, women, and children picking cotton. A guide discussed how men and women were put together to breed and that "they were well fed to give healthy children." When the babies were two to three years old, the guide explained, "they were removed from the parents in order to be trained as slaves" and "between the ages twelve and fifteen, they were able to reproduce."

(5) *Assimilation*: This scene depicted Nigeria's Calabar Carnival, a street festival that began in the 2000s and resembles carnivals found in the New World. The portrayal focused on wax figures of West Africans wearing traditional Cuban clothing. The tour guide said that the festival was a "consequence of cultural assimilation" and specifically suggested that the annual festival in Calabar was a result of cultural assimilation by enslaved West Africans sent to Cuba. The guide did not discuss the cultural traditions that enslaved West Africans brought with them to the countries in which they were enslaved, and how these traditions, such as music, dress, art, and religion impacted the culture of those destination countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom.

(6) *Escape:* This scene depicted a runway slave. A wax figure of a single Black man was shown running away from dogs and white men, who were chasing him. There was no audio material related to the scene, and the tour guides made no comments.

(7) *Capture and Punishment*: This exhibit depicted the capture and punishment of enslaved people who had temporarily escaped; one individual was being beaten by a white man and another was being attacked by a dog held by white man. In the background of this scene, there was a Black man who had been hanged. The exhibit included audio of screaming, crying, and violence, followed by singing. The tour guides did not provide any additional information on the scene.

(8) *Freedom:* This scene focused on a wax figure of a Black woman holding up her hands in the air. The exhibit also included a white man who was in the midst of removing shackles from a Black figure on the ground. The painting behind the wax figures included doves, a Black man praying, and a white man holding a list. At this exhibit, the tour guide briefly referenced the British abolitionist William Wilberforce and his work to pass the British Slave Trade Act of 1807, which prohibited the trade of enslaved captives in the British Empire. The doves in the painting were explained as representing "freedom." The tour of this exhibit concluded with a discussion of how, following 1807, some captives intercepted and freed from slave ships were transported to resettlement centers in Liberia and Freetown, Sierra Leone. The guide noted these locations were not the rescued captives' homelands, and that resulted in many not being able to trace their families or "find their way back to their home."

This gallery reflected the core themes of the museum: Oppression, exploitation and dehumanization. The displays were visually and audibly graphic and emotionally challenging. Unlike most of the Slavery Exhibition, the Slavery Diorama Exhibition engaged visitors' emotions and empathy. This is no small feat. However, an over-reliance on emotive media also led to a very narrow and limited experience for visitors. In particular, they were left without sufficient grounding in the wider cultural context of transatlantic slavery. The scenes, barring capture, were exclusively set in the Americas with white people often centered as the sole and only protagonists in the narrative. This depiction did not represent the complete and contextually nuanced narrative of slave trade in reality. For instance, there were no examples of the treatment of those enslaved in West Africa itself or of West African plantations, slave cells, or slave markets. The depiction of "freedom" also focused too much on white actors, ignoring both Black abolitionists and some runaway slaves' success in founding independent and free settlements, thus emancipating themselves.

### *Nigeria's Ancient Art and Traditions Exhibition*

The last exhibit starkly contrasted the Slavery Diorama Exhibition. It sought to celebrate and highlight the highly complex art and traditions that existed in the West African area now defined as Nigeria before colonization. The presentation worked to counter Eurocentric rhetoric and racist narratives of ancient Nigeria as an uncivilized landscape with evidence of the diverse and complex cultural traditions that existed in the area prior to Europeans' arrival.

The exhibit's first display presented photographs of the excavation of the Dufuna Canoe in the late 1980s (Adewuwi 2014, 1). This canoe, which is more than 8000 years old, is among the very oldest surviving boats known in the world. Other parts of the exhibit also relied on on traditional wall displays – for example, using photographs of archaeological objects accompanied by textual descriptions, rather than presenting the objects themselves. A tour guide commented on the political context underlying the general absence of artifacts in this section of the museum: "you know where most the objects are … the British Museum … the Smithsonian had some objects, but they had sent the museum photographs to use in the exhibition." To one side of the exhibition, there was a summary of some of the major cultural groups that existed in the geographical area that is now Nigeria. These groups (including the Nok, Calabar, Ukwu, Ife, Owo, Lower Niger, Benin, and Esie) were also linked to specific time periods in the exhibit and provided themes for each of eight display areas. Each display in the exhibition followed a formula: A photograph of key object accompanied by a written description of the object and facts about its location, cultural association, and time period. These descriptions tended to be tediously detailed but generally failed to humanize the objects and explain their connection to contemporary cultural and ethnic traditions.

While not yet fully realized, the interpretive potential of this gallery is rooted its celebration of the diverse local cultural traditions that existed prior to the transatlantic slave trade and colonization. Had this exhibition been presented to visitors at the beginning of the museum, prior to the exhibits on slavery, it could have provided an important contextual narrative framework for the museum as a whole. A wider interpretive frame of reference here would help. In particular, visitors would benefit from explanations of the slave trade and colonization as mechanisms for the destructive assimilation and

erasure of culture. This type of analysis could have acted as a stark reminder to visitors of all that has been lost through the slave trade as well as its continuing cultural impact. Reframing the narrative in this way could have enabled visitors to explore concepts of racialized discourse, racism, and racial stereotypes more fruitfully (Eichstedt and Small 2002). More investment in the exhibit, and in particular the use of objects or replicas in place of photographs, would help the museum better achieve such ends.

### *Summary*

Calabar's Slave History Museum memorialized the slave trade by providing a place to collect, preserve, and present locally specific knowledge of the slave trade and enslavement in southeastern Nigeria. As a museum created and managed by the government's National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), it also provided a framework to explore the officially sanctioned, national, and government-supported view on how the slave trade and enslavement should be presented. The narrative presented throughout the galleries was one of oppression, exploitation, and dehumanization; these themes were particularly prominent in the diorama gallery and in the tour guides' remarks (Imbua 2013, 122).

The museum's presentation of slavery was notably in line with global slave trade heritage themes. For example, the museum's presentation of capture, transport, enslavement, and abolition was far from regionally specific to Nigeria and generally followed western understandings of these concepts. Yet, the museum also provided mechanisms that challenged this global thematic narrative framework. For example, *Nigeria's Ancient Art and Traditions Exhibition* used archaeology to provide visitors with evidence of the complex cultures that existed (and exist) in West Africa before (and after) the transatlantic slave trade. Additionally, the *Slavery Diorama Exhibition: "Final Destination"* presented an audiovisual narrative that was both emotive and challenging in content, evoking empathy in visitors rather than simply relating the slave trade as a historical sequence of events.

The success of these interventions was highly dependent on the tour guides and their explanations and interactions with visitors. There was little opportunity for independent interaction with the exhibits by visitors. According to tour guides, the museum did not "formally" allow photographs to be taken by visitors. Neither did the museum support physical interaction of the public with historical objects or displays. There were no items to handle and no specific educational resources linked to the exhibitions, perhaps due to funding issues and lack of available objects. As a consequence the museum was heavily reliant on historical sources rather than archaeological evidence. The tour guides' approach did not encourage free movement on the part of visitors, limiting the time and space needed to read and reflect on much of material presented. Despite these limitations, guides were critical in providing additional historical and cultural context for the exhibits and, on occasion, even localized narratives.

On the whole, the museum displays presented slavery (from capture to emancipation) as a singular shared experience. Little attention was paid to the diverse experiences and voices of the enslaved and of enslavers. Additionally, the museum's presentation of slavery relied on western constructs and expectations. The unique impacts that the slave trade had on Calabar, including its emotional legacy and cultural memory, were not explored. These deficits may be traced to the museum's inception and development,

which Nigerian scholars have criticized for having little involvement from the local community or from academics (e.g. Imbua 2013). The museum's narrative also overlooked intergenerational, cross-cultural and intra-group tensions that existed and exist, including the complex localized contemporary relationships between the descendants of enslaver and enslaved communities in Calabar. For example, there was no discussion about Efik people's purported participation in the slave trade and the impact this has had on their current political role in Calabar as well as their ongoing relationships with Qua and Efut groups. Also ignored was what impacts the Efik's current political power had on the museum's narrative (Imbua 2013, 113; Uya 2001, 11).

Slavery, as presented by the museum, ended in 1807 with the Slave Trade Act, which outlawed slave trading in the British Empire. This view is an acute oversimplification of history. The Act, after all, did not prohibit *slavery* but rather simply the slave trade. The continuation of local palm plantations dependent on enslaved labor in Nigeria attest to this fact. And, of course, clandestine trade in enslaved captives continued, including the indigenous slave trade, regardless of changes in British law. Using the 1807 Act as a narrative conclusion is something few slavery exhibitions or museums now choose, though there are some exceptions like the 2016 East African Slavery Trade Exhibit at Christ Church Cathedral in Stone Town, Zanzibar. Overemphasis on the Slave Trade Act at the Calabar Slave History Museum runs the risk of lionizing British abolitionists while ignoring the wider legacy of the slave trade on the social, political, and economic lives of people that lived and live in the region. Here again, we see the long-term effects of the circumstances of the museums founding. Perhaps if local scholars and publics had been allowed to collaborate in developing the museum's narrative, it could have built bridges between different communities, reconnected people to their historical roots, and placed the local history of slavery in a broader landscape of global and cultural interconnectivity (Imbua 2013, 120).

With the important exception of the *Slavery Diorama Exhibition*, the museum focused on the economic and political impacts of slavery rather than the cultural or human impacts on those enslaved; it is these narratives that would have benefited from being further explored. Only though tour guides' comments and intervention was the museum transformed into an arena for visitors to discuss uncomfortable truths of racism, assimilation, and oppression, and to exchange ideas or consider more complex localized rhetoric of the slave trade and enslavement. The guides' narrative strategies enabled a story of the slave trade and enslavement to transition from, first, one of oppression and dehumanization to, later on, one of strength, resilience, and adaptability.

## Badagry

Badagry is a coastal town located in Lagos State in southwestern Nigeria on the border between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. The town was founded in 1425 A.D, and its name is locally believed to derive from "Agbedeh," a farmer who was part of the Ogu people; the area was later settled by the Yoruba (Fadipe 2010, 1). Today, it has a majority Christian Awori-Yoruba population, with continuing religious influences from both Islam and indigenous belief systems (Fadipe 2010, 2). The Portuguese arrived in Badagry in 1473, when Ferman Gomes started developing it into an important slave port (Fadipe 2010, 6). By the sixteenth century, the Spanish, Dutch, and French,

along with other European powers, were transporting captives from Badagry to what would become the United States, Cuba, and Brazil. By the nineteenth century, the Dutch, English, French, and Portuguese had claimed different quarters of Badagry; each quarter eventually had its own slave house or "barracoon." For example, in the Portuguese quarter, there was the "Brazilian Barracoon." This set of slave cells was named after the former Portuguese colony since it was the intended destination of many enslaved residents temporarily housed in the barracoon.

The majority of visitors to Badagry's heritage sites come from the nearby Lagos metropolis. Demographically, these visitors are predominantly school-aged children, typically visiting as part of local school-organized excursions. Most such visitors to Badagry undertake a tour of five local heritage sites focused on the slave trade. These are (1) the Barracoons; (2) the Mobee Royal Family Original Slave Relics Museum; (3) the First Storey House, associated with the Church Missionary Society; (4) the Heritage Museum; and (5) the Point of No Return. Multi-site tours generally start at the Barracoons and end at the Point of No Return. This integration between historic sites is purposeful. Badagry has worked to develop its tourism profile via such sites and UNESCO has supported research and promotion of the area's slave heritage, even sponsoring a book *Slave Trade and Western Civilization in Badagry* (Fadipe 2010).

Badagry continues to have major infrastructure issues, including poor road conditions. Indeed, while only approximately 70 kilometers away, the journey to Badagry from Lagos takes over 3.5 hours. Additionally, most hotels in the town cater to Nigerian visitors rather than international heritage tourists, who are likely to demand greater amenities than are available. Thus, the international tourists who do visit Badagry to see its slave trade heritage sites are those with a pre-existing interest in the topic who are also typically more experienced in travel in Africa. This article's analysis focuses on the so-called "Brazilian Barracoons," a locally overseen and privately managed museum, rather than the government-run Badagry Heritage Museum, which was closed at the time of my visit for refurbishment and renovation funded by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM).

## *Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum: "The Brazilian Barracoons"*

The Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum and its associated slave cells are situated on Marina Road on the waterfront, opposite the "Point of No Return." These barracoons or slave cells were established between 1840 and 1844 by the Portuguese to hold people kidnapped into slavery prior to these transportation in the transatlantic slave route, specifically to Brazil, a former colony of Portugal (Fadipe 2010). The site is the only surviving barracoon in Badagry; the other three recorded slave cells have been destroyed by development. The site is owned by the Abass family and, in 2002, was recognized by the NCMM as a national monument (Fadipe 2010; Osho 2016, 42).

The site presents a more localized story of enslavement and the transatlantic slave trade in Badagry through the life and times of Chief Seriki Williams Abass, himself both a former slave and a slave trader. Abass, born Ifaremilekun Fagbemi, was from the town Joga Orile in Ogun State and part of the Yoruba group (Osho 2016, 44). He was first captured as a child during a raid by the rival Dahomean and taken to their capital Abomey in modern-day Benin, where he was renamed Abass. He was

subsequently resold to a Mr. Williams, a European slave trader, who gave him the name Abass Williams and took him to Brazil (Osho 2016, 44). Williams later granted Abass Williams his freedom on the condition that he return to West Africa and act as a middleman to source slaves for him. In the 1830s, Abass settled in Badagry, where he traded enslaved captives from West Africa to European merchants. He built the extant slave cells or "barracoons" that are still standing in the 1840s (Fadipe 2010; Osho 2016, 43). Abass's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade buoyed his local political power and wealth even after the abolishment of slavery. For example, in 1913, during British rule, he was appointed local governor or "Paramount Ruler" (Osho 2016, 43).

I visited the "Brazilian Barracoons" in April 2018. The site of the barracoons was a combination of a slave trade museum, a heritage site, and a modern residence. In total, the site consists of forty slave cells, only two of which are open to the public. Some of the remaining cells are simply empty; others are currently rented out as living quarters. The front of the building has a large sign and cast metal plaque, which depicts enslaved people being traded (Figure 3). Access to the site is controlled through ticketed entry, and visitors' movement around the site is only possible by following an appointed tour guide, which requires additional payment.

Visitors enter the site through the original fragmented wooden door leading to the slave cells. Once inside, they arrive in a wide arched entrance hall, which contains displays on either side providing historical background information relating to the site. The left wall contains information about the site and its former owner, including an array of photocopies of documents and photographs affixed to the wall with tape. The content is varied, spanning academic articles about slavery, photographs of the slave trader and owner of the slave cells Seriki Williams Abass, and newspaper clippings of articles relating to the site (Ojo-Lanre 2014; Figure 4). The wall also includes a typed disclaimer from the family: "We, the descendants of Seriki Williams Abass, regret and are very sorry for the role and involvement of Seriki Ifaremi Williams Abass in the

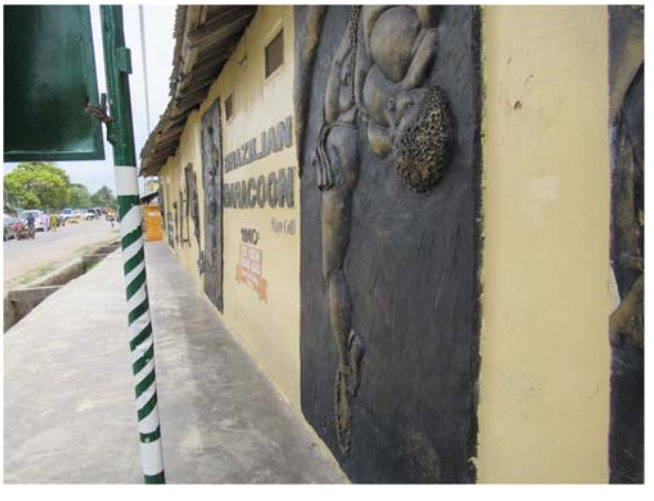


**Figure 3.** External facade of the Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum (The Brazilian Barracoons) at Badagry, 2018. Photograph by author.


**Figure 4.** Disclaimer from the family inside the Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum at Badagry, 2018. Photograph by author.

transatlantic slave trade in West Africa, either by force or by choice. We are very sorry" (Figure 4).

The right side of the entrance hall focuses on the display of objects rather than text- or photograph-based exhibits. Several items used in trade exchanges for enslaved captives were embedded in the plaster. These included umbrellas, bottles, and guns. This entrance hall was also where the guided tour began. The tour was based on five separate narrative themes, each presented and situated within a specific area of the slave cells.

(1) *Slave Trade*: In the entrance hall itself, the guide discussed the cost of enslaved captives, referring to the items used to buy slaves, which were embedded in the wall. The guide used these items to encourage active discussion, asking Nigerian visitors bluntly, "How many of you Black slaves would this umbrella buy?" The guide then discussed how such items were used as a form of money. The tour guide further asked visitors to consider how many captives could be bought for a bottle of whisky, a portion of tobacco, or a gun. Upon a visitor providing the correct response, the guide would encourage other visitors to repeat the answer.

(2) *Capture:* In the courtyard area, adjacent to the slave cells, the guide presented the capture of slaves. This narrative theme was engaged by encouraging visitors to handle collections of chains as well as an umbrella owned by Abass. The guide passed the visitors these items so they could feel and experience them while hearing an explanation of how they were used. At this point in the tour, the guide also noted that, "Slaves have no name … [slave owners] take away your identity." Then individually visitors were asked their names by the guide; after every response, the guide replied, "No, you have no name." This part of the tour was interactive, conversational, and multisensory. It successfully engaged the visitors with the topic and with the guide.

(3) *Processing:* Visitors were next led into the men's slave cell. In this two-room cell, we first entered the former inspection room. This first room presented original historical items used to constrain and punish enslaved people, such as shackles. One of the walls included a simple display board with pictures of Abass and photocopies of some archival material, including letters written to Abass and photographs of locally enslaved people. In the corner of the room, there was also a life-size wax figure of Abass. Visitors were then led into the second room, the slave cell, and presented with other historical objects relating to the slave trade, including chains and manacles. Those touring the site were asked to imagine what it would be like to be left, packed tightly with other enslaved people, in this single windowless cell for days. At this point in the tour, visitors were briefly left alone in the cell in the dark with the door closed. After the door was again opened and visitors exited, the tour guide asked them "How did it feel?" and, to Black visitors, "This is how your ancestor would have felt."

(4) *Exchange:* Visitors were then guided into a two-roomed women's slave cell, which was similar in size and structure to the men's cell. The first room housed a display entitled "Mankind of Slaver," which contained photographs of the local area during the transatlantic slave trade as well as items associated with slavery, including chains and shackles. The second room contained formal display cases, inside of which were historical items that the guide asserted "belonged to Abass." These included imported European items, such as a gramophone and blue-and-white imported pottery. The guide explained how these types of items could have been used to buy enslaved people.

(5) *Abass:* In the last portion of the tour, visitors were taken to the courtyard to view the well. The guide suggested this would have been used to provide slaves with "some" water, and noted it was still in use. The guide then presented the Mausoleum of Seriki Faremi Williams Abass, which was situated in the middle of the courtyard. Finally, he discussed the importance of remembering Abass as man who had been enslaved, gained his freedom, and became a powerful and respected local man, governing the area during British colonial rule.

The tour ended at the entrance to the museum, with a discussion regarding what life was like in Badagry before slavery, including local culture and peoples, and what had been lost due to slavery. Visitors were asked to repeat some of the key facts they had learned during the visit, including what items could be exchanged to buy an enslaved person. Visitors were encouraged to discuss nuanced, complex, and localized

understandings of the slave trade and enslavement, including relationships between enslavers and those enslaved.

The rhetoric about Abass, especially at his mausoleum, was one of remembrance, respect, and memorization. This perspective presented ethical and moral challenges. It demonstrated the site's conflicting narratives. On the one hand, Abass was a slave trader, a man who had economically and politically benefited from the enslavement and dehumanization of other individuals. On the other, Abass had been enslaved himself, traveled to the New World and back to Africa, secured his freedom, and gained respect as a "Paramount Ruler" for his governance abilities under British colonial rule.

The localized presentation at the museum also differentiated between the roles of different European powers in the area. The guide commented to me, "You are alright because you are British, right? It was the British that abolished slavery. The British gave us our freedom." Other local residents of Badagry offered a similar view to me, suggesting the British had a positive impact on the town, "abolished slavery," and "appointed a local leader as governor." The Portuguese, in contrast, were regarded by many locals as the enemy, who "built the barracoons," enslaved their kin, and removed captive people from their "homeland."

This relatively positive view of Britain in relation to the slave trade in Badagry contrasted national narratives that I came across in other Nigerian locations including Abuja, Calabar, Lagos, and Ibadan. In these places, collective memory of the slave trade and colonization tended form a palimpsest of overlapping traumas. In this context, many Nigerians actively sought to share opinions with me regarding who was to blame not only for transatlantic slavery but also for contemporary challenges facing the nation. Britain was viewed generally negatively, and its historical role was not actively differentiated from that of other European powers. One individual commented to me, "You know the damage the British have done to our country." Another asserted, "It was you white people that enslaved us and took our identity." The clearly different perspective on Britain in Badagry demonstrates the localized and contextual nature of the heritage of the slave trade and of its history, legacy, and impact on local identity.

The Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum clearly demonstrates the ethical and moral dilemmas that exist in the presentation of the transatlantic slave trade within heritage contexts. The site also enables visitors to engage in locally driven discussions relating to the presentation of such "dark" heritage. For example, is it morally justified to have Abass's mausoleum on the site? Should there be a monument to those *who* enslaved or those *who were* enslaved? Is the mausoleum an affront to the remembrance of those West Africans who were captured and sold into slavery? How does the fact that Abass was, in fact, one of them change this dilemma? Through the story of Abass – a man who had experienced abhorrent, dehumanizing treatment and who had treated fellow humans abhorrently – the museum highlights the ethical complexities and conflicting narratives inherent in the heritage of the transatlantic slave trade.

## Summary

Critical to the success of the communication and presentation of slave history at the "Brazilian Barracoons" was the ability to visit and view a "real" heritage site. The use of slave cells to recreate experiences of captives enabled visitors to undergo a form of time travel

and imagine themselves as enslaved individuals. This approach provided visitors with a multisensory experience. As demonstrated in visitors' recitation of facts learned at the end of the tour, this type of experiential learning may bolster visitors' ability to retain new knowledge as well as their willingness to face uncomfortable truths.

The Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum relied heavily on photocopied material, with only a limited range of historical objects present, including items of capture and punishment and items acquired through the slave trade. Despite the low number of historical objects at the museum, guides effectively used them to further visitors' understanding of the slave trade. Most often, objects served to illustrate the economic motivations for the slave trade. Guides also used objects to explore the social, cultural, and personal impacts of the slave trade through objects. The success of the historical objects in presenting and communicating the history of the transatlantic slave trade at Badagry was based on the ability of tour guides to communicate the human impact of enslavement and to create a locally relevant narrative of the slave trade that was based on humanizing the past through placing real people in it.

In the tour, accuracy was sometimes overlooked to enhance visitors' experience and engagement. Most of the museum's guides were not formally or academically trained, although they did have far-reaching knowledge and interest in the topic. Guides largely skipped over the idea of Abass as a slave-turned-slave-trader, and the relationship of the slave trade to conflicts that did and still do exist between different ethnic groups in the region was not considered. The majority of the narrative presented at the site was a simple story of dehumanization, punishment, abuse, and the exchange of human life for luxury items. Yet, within this narrative, relatively little of the site was explained in detail. The wider historical context of the transatlantic slave trade also was not explored. What was presented, especially in the exhibit's text, was a story of Portuguese traders who enslaved West Africans, and the past pain and current impact of enslavement. This narrative of the slave trade was similar to that presented at Calabar's Slave History Museum in that it ended with abolition, here defined as "when the Portuguese left." Despite Abass being a slave trader, the wider role of certain West African groups as participants in the slave trade was not emphasized.

The success of the museum in communicating the effects and legacies of the slave trade was centered on a localized and humanized approach. The tour guide fostered active discussions with visitors regarding the impact that the slave trade had on local culture. From the outset, the tour focused on helping visitors experientially relate to the site's past, when the cells were used to contain and trade enslaved people. This type of engagement was achieved via discussion, handling of objects, and challenging visitors to remember information. For example, at the end of the tour, a school group was asked, "How many of you could be traded for an umbrella?"

Despite the tour's overall strengths, the Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum does highlight some problems that may arise through localized and private control of heritage assets. For example, the Abass family controlled access to the museum site, with ticket prices unfixed and changing depending on each visitor. The owners were also wary of outsiders, asking if I were a "government spy" at one point. Site owners expressed concern about the lack of support from the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) for locally important sites. This lack of government backing was clear throughout the "Brazilian Barracoons" in the poor preservation of

historical objects and the site as a whole, the poor quality of some display panels, and the inconsistent historical accuracy. Many of these problems could be overcome through local training programs run by the NCMM or academic institutions and investment in local heritage assets, rather than creating new or renovated official museums, such as the nearby government-run Badagry Heritage Museum.

## Analysis

Nigeria's slave trade museums are the only "official" heritage arenas in the country that provide a detailed examination of the topic of the slave trade and enslavement. That is, slavery is not considered in detail by any federally or state supported national or regional museums. When it is present at all in larger museums, the heritage of slave trade in Nigeria is considered as a separate strand of history to be presented alongside ethnic histories or stories of independence, but not integrated with them. In Nigeria, communication about the slave trade and enslavement has been siloed, separated from the nation's wider heritage discourses and national narratives of colonial geography, independence, and current political relationships. These are, of course, really interconnected histories of identity. However, heritage organizations in Nigeria (for example, the National Museum in Lagos) have shied away from developing exhibits that explore these connections. The history of slavery and the slave trade clearly conflicts with notions of national strength, freedom, and pride. As such, specialist museums such as those in Calabar and Badagry have been created to present this "difficult" and "dark" heritage in isolation for those who choose to consume it. As Croucher (2015) suggests, creating a separate narrative of the slave trade flattens out, oversimplifies, and homogenizes the heritage and history of slavery; it removes the slave trade and enslavement in Nigeria from its unique historical and political context (Croucher 2015, 362). The isolation of this history in specialist museums serves to remove discussion of slavery from both wider national heritage narratives and contemporary interregional dialogues about the slave trade and slavery.

The slave trade shaped the history of Nigeria: It grew and destroyed economies, transformed cultural landscapes, and dehumanized, subjugated, and oppressed millions of people. Yet what has been largely overlooked, even in specialist slave trade museums' narratives, is the wider diverse cultural and ethnic context in which transatlantic slavery and the slave trade was situated. Additionally, specialist museums tend to temporally isolate slavery from the wider chronology of the region's past. What is not presented, for the most part, is the fact that the transatlantic slave trade represents only a brief part of the history of the region, barely four centuries in lands occupied for tens of thousands of years. The narratives presented in both museums analyzed in this article focused on this period of time to the exclusion of a wider and deeper historical context.

For example, official narratives of the transatlantic slave trade presented at Calabar's Slave History Museum portrayed the enslavement and trade of West Africans as the result of European arrival and colonization; these narratives ended with abolition, specifically the British Slave Trade Act of 1807. There was no attention in either the exhibits or on the part of tour guides, to the practice of slavery in the region prior to Europeans' arrival and after the British outlawed the slave trade in their empire. Yet, the

enslavement of people is a contemporary concern in Nigeria, with an estimated of 1,384,000 people currently enslaved in the country (Global Slavery Index 2018). Rather than engaging in such complexities and conflicting narratives of enslavement, the dominant framework at the museum focused on white European enslavers as antagonists and white European abolitionists as protagonists. This approach decenters Nigerians from their own history and discounts the agency of enslaved people in freeing themselves. It also, as Smith (2011, 260) suggests, potentially reinforces visitors' emotional and intellectual commitment to certain forms of pre-existing knowledge, viewpoints, and values.

The government-run Slave Trade Museum in Calabar focused on passive and one-dimensional narratives of oppression, dehumanization, and subjugation. As presented, these themes closely align with western understandings of slavery and were geared towards specific visitor demographics, principally visitors of African descent living in the diaspora and other international tourists as opposed to local populations (Croucher 2015, 362). Yet, at Calabar as at Badagry, weaker infrastructure and underdeveloped facilities meant that international tourists were nonetheless unlikely to visit. The official historical narratives at Calabar conflict with more nuanced and localized heritage rhetoric, such as that presented at Badagry's "Brazilian Barracoons." At the Abass Slave Museum, emotionally complex, politically and socially contextualized, local, and personal accounts of the transatlantic slave trade were firmly aimed at a regional rather than international visitor demographic. The localized heritage discourse that was presented at Badagry was active, emotive, and people-centric; it provided a tool for local and regional visitors to negotiate the continued contested and conflicting relationships between local descendants of enslavers and those who were enslaved.

Nigerian museums that specialize in the heritage of the transatlantic slave trade rely heavily on reproduced photographs, rather than objects or original documentary and archival material, principally because much of the primary material has been lost, removed, sold, or illegally stolen. For example, many historical metal objects such as shackles and chains were subsequently melted down or lost through lack of conservation and preservation. It is also likely that some of these items may have been deliberately destroyed due to their association with oppression and dehumanization. Surviving historical documents are likely to be sequestered in archives inaccessible to the general public; other documents have failed to survive due to lack of preservation and conservation. The absence of primary documents and historical objects negatively affected visitor engagement in the museums. The limited material presented also made the role of the tour guides even more critical. In both museums analyzed, tour guides played a significant role in interpreting the transatlantic slave trade for visitors. Guides contributed significantly to visitors' discussion of complex issues including race and human rights; they also encouraged debates, such as whether to rename places in Nigeria that had been named after enslavers. At both Badagry and Calabar, the guides generally did not shy away from presenting the horror of slavery, encouraging visitors to emotionally invest in the subject through emotive language and roleplay.

Regardless of these efforts, very few Nigerians will ever experience these tours. Few can afford the money or time to visit museums or heritage sites. Visiting museums is also not a widely shared sociocultural norm, and the economic climate does not support it as a leisure activity. Rather, museums are viewed as places to learn and spaces to present information that should be remembered by visitors, especially Nigerian children.

Museums are viewed as having a role to play in teaching children a specific version of what it means to be "Nigerian." As a result, the majority of visitors to slave trade museums, like other museums in the country, are children on school-organized trips. However, during my visits, this demographic pattern did not result in visitors of being presented with a simplified or sanitized version of the past. The pedagogical approaches of Calabar's Slave History Museum and Badagry's Seriki Faremi Williams Abass Slave Museum mirror those of many Nigerian schools guided by behaviorist theories in which children are taught by rote. Guides frequently asked children to repeat answers, or to read information, and later repeat it back while being tested to see if they recalled it. This did appear to result, at least immediately following their visit, in much information being remembered.

The presentation of the transatlantic slave trade at specialist museums in Nigeria illustrates the troubling effects of a lack of sustainable and widespread support for such heritage in the country. These problems are not just the consequence of the colonial legacy of Nigerian museums' early history, nor are they the result of the enormous size and population of Nigeria, nor are they due to widespread poverty, underfunding, or government corruption. We must also consider the effect of the government's centralized control of slave-related heritage and its unilateral determination of what heritage is. With decision-making around heritage work centralized, there is little room in Nigeria for an understanding of the complex and localized nature of heritage as well as the diverse values placed on heritage by Nigerians. The case studies examined demonstrate that strengthening museum education about the transatlantic slave trade in Nigeria requires a consideration of localized counter-narratives as well as the deconstruction and decolonization of national narratives. As the tour guides at both sites demonstrated, successful narratives require peopling, localizing, and contextualizing the past (Fennell 2015; Fabian 2013). It is these nuances that enable visitors to approach the history of slavery with an empathetic, rather than just analytical, eye (Smith 2011).

## Conclusion

This review of the representation and presentation of the transatlantic slave trade to the public at two specialist museums in Nigeria highlights the conflicting local and national narratives underlying such history. These complex and emotionally charged narratives often struggle to be at once accurate and contextually relevant, and as a result they may have lessened impact on visitors' knowledge and previously held assumptions (Apoh, Anquandah, and Amenyo-Xa 2018; Croucher 2015; Eichstedt and Small 2002; Horton 2006; Nash 2006; Smith 2011). Slave trade museums in Nigeria, as elsewhere, frequently represent "slavery" as a singular, homogenous, and temporally discrete event driven by and impacting past economies. Only infrequently are slave-related museums able to successfully consider transatlantic slavery's continuing impact on contemporary events, global economies, local politics, and cultures (Croucher 2015, 348). The transatlantic slave trade has influenced individual, local, regional, national, and global concepts of identity and race; as such, it is impossible to separate the slave trade from wider historical narratives of Nigeria or West Africa more broadly.

The case studies overviewed in this article show how the presentation of transatlantic slavery in museums and heritage sites in Nigeria is variously influenced by local, regional,

and national narratives and socio-political contexts. Slave trade museums and sites of enslavement act as places of remembrance to curate, protect, and store the past. The key question for heritage professionals is how a more complete and complex narrative of the nature and impact of the slave trade can be communicated to the public. How can the public be stirred to empathize with past people, to alter their pre-conceived ideas of the past, to challenge over-simple stories of the past, and to welcome the opportunity to learn from the past? True representation of the transatlantic slave trade within museums requires the presentation of a full range of evidence including archaeological artifacts and oral history, however uncomfortable and painful, in order to move away from white-centric narratives based primarily on archival documents (Apoh, Anquandah, and Amenyo-Xa 2018; Croucher 2015; Fabian 2013; Fennell 2015; Horton 2006; Vlach 2006). Museums and heritage projects that aim to change audience perceptions should emphasize immersing visitors in people-centric narratives. The empathy thus engendered with past people could enable the public to better face uncomfortable and potentially personal truths about the slave trade and enslavement that move beyond victimization and stereotypes (Fabian 2013, 206; Apoh, Anquandah, and Amenyo-Xa 2018, 106; Eichstedt and Small 2002). One approach could be a multinational and multisite dialogue that considers local narrative frameworks, and enables the public to engage in conflicting and contradictory global stories of the transatlantic slave trade. Such a project in some ways resembles UNESCO's Slave Route Project, the major distinction being a greater localization of the stories of slavery collected and presented. For example, the project could include a consideration of counter-discourse from descendent communities of those enslaved and descendants of those who enslaved others. Such dialogues would challenge the public to confront uncomfortable histories and understand "how people like us could do such things," challenging the rhetoric of heritage to decolonize our understanding of the past (Blight 2006; Eichstedt and Small 2002). This approach also has the potential to impact people's beliefs and connect them to the past, so they might learn, reflect, heal, and alter their ideologies (Eichstedt and Small 2002, 252; Smith 2011, 260).

The presentation of transatlantic slavery to the public in Nigeria, as elsewhere, is at a critical juncture. Balancing ethical considerations, cultural relevance, public sensitivity, and historical and archaeological "facts" is difficult. This difficulty has resulted in some heritage organizations avoiding engaging with the multitude of diverse descendent communities on the subject or shying away from presenting the slave trade at all. In order to more deeply develop their publics' understanding of the transatlantic slave trade, museums must develop exhibits that emphasize the unique cultural setting and impacts of the slave trade and enslavement on specific localities at both origin and final destination points. The presentation of the transatlantic slave trade within museums requires an active approach. In order to productively explore this emotive and morally abhorrent topic with visitors, we must first take as a given that events of the past continue to influence the present.

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## Notes on contributor

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