

# "... in to the Court to have their Freedom"

### The case of Famoyah and Eward Forster

Eward Forster's memorandum shows the working of slavery in Lagos. Famoyah's master had died, leaving her prey to a variety of family members; eager to carry her off to 'AbbeoKuta' for sale or to pass her on to an unnamed Brazilian. However, Eward Forster, having been assured that Famoyah was 'a good one and as I have no wife she can cook and give me water and all and every necessary work for me. For this reason I paid for her redemption twelve bags of Cowries as my wife...' Having registered Famoyah as an 'apprentice', Forster then 'carried her to the Governor and gave her freed not as a slave but my real wife and from thence after she heard that those whom they have apprenticed such as two years - after she heard that they always go in to the Court to have their Freedom. She left my house on the 9th August...all what I have in the house she took away.



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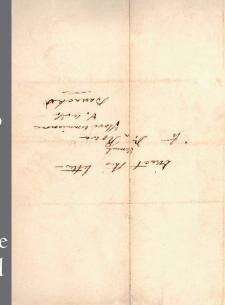
hit have Thursday Mars

The story is confused and confusing especially in Eward's uncertain prose. Rowe seems to have little difficulty however and, in one of the rare examples of a recorded judgement, simply endorsed the petition in blue pencil 'Edward Forster - his woman was free and it was optional with her to go

## The Lagos Slave Court, 1860-1864.

Lagos was annexed by the British in 1861. Although the trade in slaves had been outlawed in 1807 and slavery itself abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833, the annexation caused local British officials some concern. Fearing unrest in the new colony, they declined to act decisively against the local form of slavery; referring cases instead to an ad hoc Slave Court. In 1866 the system came to an end with the clear ruling from Britain that this local arrangement was wrong and that slavery had been illegal in Lagos for the past five years.

Few records have survived from this period. However, one bundle of petitions and related papers has been preserved at the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland. These survived amongst the papers of Samuel Rowe, who had trained as a surgeon in Leicester but who also acted as a slave commissioner and judicial assessor in the Chief Magistrate's Court of Lagos.



Showunny and Calunina This letter to Dr Rowe suggests how widespread 'domestic' slavery was in Lagos. Showunny and Calunina declare here that they had recently arrived with their children in Lagos from Bahia. They had fallen ill and knowing that there was a spate of thefts from houses, 'We thought the best way to secure our remaining money from thieves would be to buy some slaves and add them to our family, as we then saw no harm in doing so, because we saw many of our friends who came before us have slaves in their family. We therefore bought 7 persons to add them to our little family. Lately three of them ran away, two to the slave Court, and one to the Government's yard.

### Lagos 10th January 1563. De allanger Rowe Smast herfort stranger

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interest to our Native Land without being Liable to be sold aquin, we at once made up see minds to emigrate to Lagos.

Obtained our free doom in the usual way, left Jameiro and landed at Sages about a year ago, and were both very sichly

To the Commissioners

of the Stave Court

Guard Houter .

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Those few petitions or letters represent a remarkable record of African slave culture, in the words of both slaves and slave owners who faced the loss of valuable human property.

## Slavery in Lagos

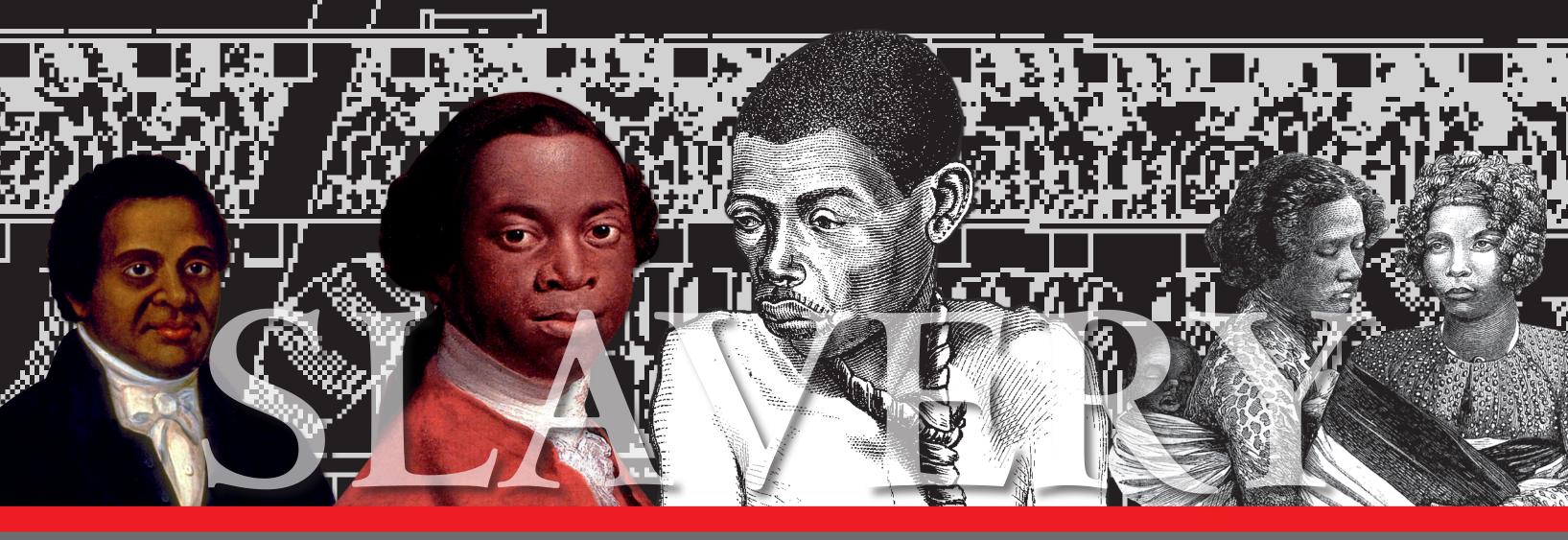
Slavery has taken many forms. In Lagos in the years preceding the annexation, it was common for slaves to be absorbed into the families of their owners, often virtually as wives or children. Others were bought as a safe form of investment, or to secure good care in old age. Such slaves were usually treated as part of an extended family, sharing domestic accommodation and duties. As the cases brought before Samuel Rowe suggest, the looseness of these arrangements (and the different attitudes of those concerned towards them) could lead to much distress and confusion.

At our appearance at the Court, your honour ordered us to bring the other four slaves and we did so ....

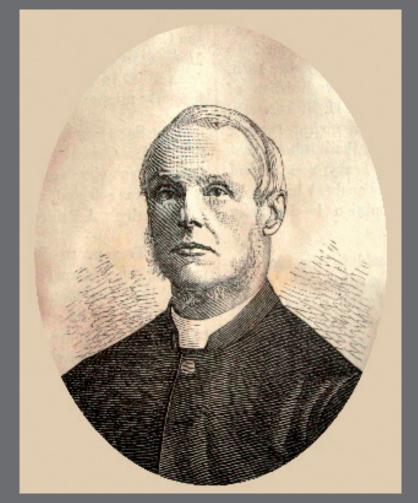
of speaking to your konous, though we came very prequently to the Court. One of as, whought to have came with they, is unwell, and therefore of light to send the write. The have of the down of the write the have pilly as and our children. If we have finded against the law it must be thereas for your homeway the will already ignor a home and the influences. May your forgive us whatever we may have ignorantly done, and restore those persons to so is we will deal kindly with with us as strangers and an ignor and people. God assist your honour. Meare, Sir. your most unworthy Secondo

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# "... in to the Court to have their Freedom"



### Lagors 12th May 1863. To the bornmissioners of the Slave bourt

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#### Pedro & Julia Josey

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This petition is interesting as much for its autobiographical details (and flattery of 'the good England') as the surprising willingness of liberated slaves to inflict slavery on others. The Joseys petitioned the Slave Court for the return of their slave boy. 'Having heard while at Janeiro some-thing of the free kindness and unmerited goodness of the English nation in taking upon themselves to rescue many of our

for several months together, all who used to our prolonged ill health ... Having neither nor daughter to a stist us, and havin nor daughter to a set the, and having previously heard that any one might be-tain slaves brought down from the intenor, (but not to sall him again ) we were included to pay for the boy, who is now in This Slave Coment.

In short we beg the Commissioners to pardon our ignorante an strangers who have not weight offended the laws. On the honoroable Commissioners might take pily on us, and apprentice the boy to us for a term of genes. He prostead ourdelves before your horvour to do a for us in this case. He are only hove persons and howing no one else as aforesaid Mathe our hamble respects.

Meare, Sine, your most obedient, and unwrithy Servants, Pedro and Julia Josey.



### Obastana and Asatoo

The case brought before the Slave Court by Obastana on behalf of his brother, Adeogun, is another interesting one. Once again the slave, Asatoo, is described as 'redeemed' by her master and as in other cases she is considered almost a member of the family: 'Adeogun...paid 102 heads couries [cowries] for her redemption she was with him about 10 years ago, he trained her during this time within the family so humane that no body who is not their neighbour knows that she is a slave, but thought that she must be one of the family. And my brother Adeogun in order to make known to the said Asatoo that he does not wish her for a slave, he gave her to his own son for wife.'

Curiously, this change in her status seems to have affected Asatoo: 'the girl changed her conduct...going from house to house in search of men, some-times stop[p]ed two - three days out with men...' On her return to Adeogun, Asatoo stole some clothing and ran away to her sister, who 'wishes to redeem her'. Adeogun was not keen to sell, 'because his son loves her very much' but Obastana, clear-headed in business matters, adds 'if the girl determines not to return to her former abode I will not be sorry to receive the aforesaid 102 heads couries with which she was redeemed before.

Rev. James A Lamb of the Church Mission Society. Was Lamb deliberately sheltering Agia? Or was his response to Boyahen factual and disinterested ?

University of Birmingham Special Collections: Church Mission Society Collection

The bornmissioner of the Mane bound Lagar 30 January 1864 West boast of africa Any have the konor to unform you Commissioner of the Said bourt thaton the 31 day of april 1869 a Summer was used out of the bourt by one function and Comprant from Dragit aquintone name Shine my boy Stating that the Said aque before the slave commissioner. Mave tote given to the acover by begging to much having taken his firt the said ligia Receipt now Aget with me and detained the was appeared the bourt your bommiser or Decided that the gill must be taken from the Cail agen my boy and be given to her maker free on an emerger agie Work the girl with him land rand away from my have when I have non an fed quering I heard that he and his wife were with Mr Das a Lamb to me d with over a mo Lamb and asked him Pant there the base Dismised about Ven and there the bas Damined about den day after the laid aque went our to his girl Since and have to do with his girl Since by the the freemant. Just who is the owner of the Sing girl tent for agive my boy stating that agive must for hay for he girl of mithe will not falle back the girl, the laid by you have heps my boy wish your dirice the two weeks age Mr Lume lots me that playment as Harseman the Ealay a hamb what is tobe dave he lots me We hand what is file day he lots me that he is not a birdge I most go to the light if the barnet thall see of for him is with me will go I have asked my hay to go meny. Therefore buy your to menere was to asked me in the Matter and mimetally apply will be the Matter and not pape back the gill the court agin have no more to pay for the gol and the the the line to the the the the court to me that I must please as to asked think to fary the money which is gold noist head of Courties I had the think to I have no movy appy will be than kfully. in hand to pay hing the lase has been branght before

country people from the hand of those who would lead them to everlasting slavery over the sea. We often wished that [we] were among the happy number of them who were thus captured and liberated.

Some few months ago we heard that they good England has taken possession of Lagos, and that the authorities at Lagos are very kind to the Emigrants of the various parts as well as their own black subjects from Sierra Leone ... '

The Joseys obtained their freedom 'in the usual way' and left 'Janeiro' for Lagos. However, being unwell and without children, they bought a slave boy, 'who is now in this Slave Court'. They were under the impression that slaves 'brought down from the interior' might be retained but not resold. They therefore appeal to the Court for pity and request that the boy be apprenticed to them 'for a term of years'.

### George Boyahen and the Boy, Agia

George Boyahen's letter to the Slave Court tells a complicated story. The story begins in April 1863 when a summons was issued against Boyahen's 'boy' Agia on behalf of a Brazilian named Juwon. Agia had taken up with Juwon's 'girl' Sinabu, who was returned by the Court to Juwon. Agia however continued to 'have to do with his girl Sinabu there she pregnants'. Juwon demanded that Agia pay for the girl but having no money, he appealed to Boyahen for help. Boyahen agreed to pay 90 heads of cowries and has the receipt issued by the Slave Court as proof. 'About two weeks ago' however, Agia ran away again, taking Sinabu with him, to Rev James A Lamb of the Church Mission Society. Boyahen approached Lamb: 'Mr Lamb told me that my boy came to him and asked him for employment as Horseman...I asked Mr Lamb what is to be done he told me that he is not a Judge I must go to the Court...

This case shows not only the complicated nature of slavery in Lagos but also the tangled webs that Samuel Rowe and his colleagues had to untangle. This case is unusual in that from Boyahen's evidence we can see the ambivalent attitude of the newly established British authorities in Lagos towards slavery. Sinabu was returned to her master and the court itself receipted a payment of cowries by Boyahen to 'redeem' her. Sadly we do not know how the matter of Agia, Sinabu and George Boyahen was resolved.

of adeogues my brother, This said aschoo was a I the house some day ago without any cause The aforesaid dealor was reduced by my said brother a deogues when very jound and paid 102 hears courses for her rederaption et was with him about 10 years ago, he train her during This times at this the family so human that no body who is not there neigh knows that she is a slaw, but thought that the must be one of the family And m brother Adeogues an order 5 make kuccord & the said asalon That he does not wish her for a slang he gave her to his own how for wife after this, the fort changed her can duy Trary 6 what She has been Doinf and foing frow house to hove in search of men, some times stoped two - these days out with men

and when she pleased to return, nobody chas. lice her only they in the house becought her not 5 do to get what they I any and we caught her not to Not here not this could be began this conduct of slepping out when the began there's surprise he haven't that she sound of her hult and & mother in law's clothes, and that sh is gone allogether to one her sider who wishes to reduces her. as for my brother's part, he does not wich to sell her, because his sow loves her very me but if the girl detanines not to return to her former abode hwill not be sorry to receive the aforesaid 100 heads comies with which are is reduced before. This is my complains which I left to your serious consideration and your servant will be contine with your good judg ment law horioured sin the your hundele servant Obashuan