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Imprints of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Badagry: Notes from Retreat and Excursion Experience of Crawford University Representatives

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Introduction

Varied forms of slavery and captive labor systems have existed in human societies over past millennia. In the areas where the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was in operation, its impacts upon the socio-cultural heritage of particular populations are often showcased in nodes of cultural heritage tourism. Such heritage tourism typically relies on museums for curating and disseminating information about those histories. Badagry is a foremost tourist location in Nigeria, with the history relating to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade being increasingly and significantly preserved and presented through themes of heritage tourism. The impact of the European system of slavery along the coast of Badagry continues to reflect upon the everyday life of the people in that region, as the related structures of museums, international tourism, and memorialized slave trade routes remain focal points within Nigeria and other regions.

Badagry has emerged as a prominent focus of African diaspora and slave history heritage tourism. Crawford University is located in proximity to Badagry and Igbesa in Ogun State, Nigeria. As a result of that spatial and historical relationship, representatives of the university undertook an excursion and retreat in 2023 which focused upon the local, heritage sites of slavery impacts. This article was prepared by Alaba Simpson, a professor at Crawford University at the time of the retreat and excursion, and Peter Mesewaku, an Assistant Curator and tour guide of the Badagry Heritage Museum, to provide both outsider and insider perspectives on those experiences of learning from the preservation of history relating to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Badagry.

Crawford University's Retreat and Excursion

The university group's retreat was undertaken during an international Black History month in August. This event was organized under the leadership of the Vice Chancellor of the university, Professor Reuben Jiya Kolo, whose tenure as Vice Chancellor covered the period of 2020 to 2025. The excursion was coordinated by Mesewaku of the Badagry Heritage Museum. The retreat and related excursions took place from August 1-3 (see Figures 1-12) and the team was housed at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), in Topo, Badagry.

Badagry Heritage Museum: Built to Preserve and Present History

The first port of call by the university visiting team was the Badagry Heritage Museum, where the team was met and welcomed by Mesewaku. In his welcome address, he provided a background history of Badagry town, specifically portraying the area as a former slave coast community occupied by a people with unique, indigenous culture. The excursion began from the Badagry Heritage Museum, which plays a prominent role among heritage sites in the region.

The museum was set up in the year 2001 by Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments, but it is owned and managed by the Lagos State Government. The specific aim of putting up the Badagry Heritage Museum was to preserve the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its impacts in Badagry. It is therefore dedicated to the theme of the slave trade and the need to preserve and present the related histories. Badagry Heritage Museum is situated within the confines of an old colonial structure that was built in 1863 and formerly used as office of the colonial District Officer in Badagry. The colonial use of the premises was terminated in 1958, two years before Nigeria's attainment of independence.

Badagry Heritage Museum presents exhibits of interest to local, regional, African, and international visitors interested in histories of the Trans-Atlantic trade and related histories of indigenous and diaspora populations. The museum is considered to possess and display a comprehensive collection of information on the slave trade which earn the location a national reputation. It is therefore a major diaspora tourist site that attracts the highest proportion of visitors and excursionists in Badagry. The museum presents evidence about the modes of operation of the slave trade, as well the events leading to abolition of that dreadful institution. Badagry Heritage Museum also preserves and presents information relating to missionary activities, the colonial administration era, and the indigenous cultures of the peoples of the

region. The museum ensures convenient affordability for visitors as the entry fee is highly subsidized. The admission fee for an adult, domestic is N1,000.00 (One Thousand Naira) or N2,000.00 (Two Thousand Naira) for international visitors. Students pay far less for admission. Within the museum information is grouped into sections, with the exhibits on display contained in galleries as discussed below.

Galleries of the Badagry Heritage Museum

The Introduction Gallery reveals a flowing pattern of the museum to guide visitors' movement within the museum. This gallery provides a brief overview of the beginnings and operations of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The gallery presents texts with detailed narrations concerning the beginning of the slave trade. In addition to this, there are maps that show the continents that participated in the trade and the slave ports along the west coasts of Africa. Inside this Gallery, there are pictures showing four generations of enslaved persons on one plantation.

The Capture Gallery consists of texts and maps that explain the sources of slave captivity. The manner of captivity and the system that was adopted in slave branding are also on display. Other exhibits include shackles, a neck chain, hand chain, ankle chain, and leg chain. Images depict the branding of an enslaved individual and captors raiding a village. Displays also include a copy of a bill advertising for the sale of slaves, which was obtained from the Wilberforce museum. A bust sculpture of an enslaved individual who has been gagged is also presented.

Equipment Gallery. Available exhibits in this gallery include a prototype of a slave ship used as carriage to transport captives across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. There is also an iron drinking pot of the type used by the captives. The texts in this gallery depict the condition of the slaves inside the lower deck of a slave vessel. Pictures showing how the slaves were arranged inside the hold of the ship are also on display.

Resistance and Punishment Gallery. Following the pattern in other galleries, this space presents texts that explain different types of punishment that were meted out to African slaves. For example, there is a picture of a life-sized sculpture depicting a dog that was ferociously after a run-away slave. Among other exhibits are pictures showing captives whom were stripped naked, tied to stakes, and beaten by the slave merchants. The gallery also presents records of resistance by the African captives.

Industry Gallery. The text labels in this gallery explain the categories of slaves who worked on different types of plantations. These include domestic and field slaves. There are two life-sized statues of domestic slaves (male and female) and other pictures of captives working on different plantations.

Abolitionists Gallery. The available interpretations in this gallery are mainly texts which explain the factors that led to the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the roles that were played by the abolitionists, both in Europe and America. The gallery also contains pictures of some of the abolitionists, such as William Wilberforce, John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Granville Sharp, and Harriet Tubman, and later advocates, such as Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois.

Integration Gallery. Through its texts and images this gallery sheds light on the cultural interactions that exist between Nigeria and Brazil as a result of the impacts of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. According to the historical records that exist in the museum, most of the slaves that were taken to Bahia in Brazil, were taken from south western Nigeria. As a result numerous African traditional beliefs are still being preserved and observed in Bahia. There are also pictures showing Brazilian architecture in different parts of West Africa as brought back home by the former slave returning from Brazil.

Facilitators' Gallery. In this gallery, a visitor finds pictures of both the African and European slave dealers. Among these facilitators are King Alvere of Congo, King Togbesu of Dahomey, Chief Sunbu Mobee and Chief Seriki Abass (both from Badagry), John Hawkins of England, Sir Henry the Navigator from Portugal, Humphery Maurice from England, Pierre Diesse from France, and Felix Da Souza of Brazil. These pictures are accompanied by texts that provide information regarding their activities.

UNESCO's Interest in Badagry's Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Stories

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has taken notable interest in the impacts of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade on Badagry and its peoples and heritage. According to Hubert J. Charles, a former UNESCO Representative to Nigeria (2001: foreword):

UNESCO's partnership with the people of Badagry was borne out of the recognition that the town played a crucial role in the Trans-

Atlantic Slave Trade and hence in the Slave Routes system. There are a few architectural relics in the town reminiscent of the slave fortes of Ghana or Senegal's Gore. However, the town's slavery past is an integral part of the folklore of the town and the authorities are keen to capitalize on this in terms of the cultural tourism plans of the town and Lagos State generally.

Charles' observed linkage of Badagry's folklore with their past experiences of slavery can be seen, for example, in evidence of traditions of dance in local folkways. Traditions of dance form important aspects of local cultural practices. Simpson (1992) noted the presence of a "Freedom Dance" form in the cultural entertainment domain in Badagry. It is usually performed to suit required occasions although its message has remained focused over time, being constantly performed to commemorate the condition of the enslaved in the Americas. In particular, movements during the dance performance are suggestive of the slave merchants' ill-handling of captives (Simpson 2001: 55-56): "The dance is performed as often as occasion demands and it portrays the basic ideas involved in the notion of oppression such oppression is not restricted to slavery also to various forms of neo-colonialism."

Occasionally during Black-History month in August, Indigenes also come together to sensitize the community about past European slavery activities in Badagry. During such performances, other slavery related cultural activities are also observed in the community. Thus, UNESCO's linkage of the community's folklore with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade that was mentioned by Charles can be said to be apparent in the place.

Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Relics in Badagry

To date, the persisting presence of slave relics abound in Badagry as reminders of the impacts of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in the area (Simpson 2008). The relics include canon guns, slave wells, slave chains and shackles, the slave market, Barracoons (interim slave storage houses), slave wells and cisterns, ornaments possessed by the slave dealers, a Portuguese gift of an umbrella to a prominent local slave dealer, a sign post of the departure venue known as "the door of no return," among others (see Figures 1-12). The skeletal remains of a famous Portuguese slave merchant, Fredrick Hertough, popularly known among the indigenes as *Hunto*

Konu (the smiling Sailor) are believed to lie in his tomb in close proximity to the Royal palace of the Akran of Badagry and in full view of the public.

During the tour of the museum, there was an atmosphere of clear emotional display of anger, sadness, or sobriety on the countenance of the excursionists. Some members of the Crawford University team actually tried the slave chains on their necks in order to feel the weight of the slave capture equipment and to enable them identify with the process of torture and unspeakable discomfort that their African ancestors went through (Figure 5). Many members of the university team could not restrain their emotions as the guides took the team through animated descriptions of the extremely difficult experiences of the captive Africans. The identification of excursionists with the cruel treatments that were meted out to the slaves during the period of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade can be seen to resonate with Izuakor's (2008) perception of the tourist in the museum. He was of the view that after having been exposed to information relating to the history of a people's past, the excursionist "would have shaken hands with the past."

Akinade (1998) similarly observed that a museum is an institution that has the archival and curatorial capacities to link the past, present, and future lifeways of a people. Along this line, the visit by the Crawford University team to the museum in Badagry can be said to have brought the members of the team in contact with the past life of the people in Badagry. The final relic that the university team viewed was the "Door of No Return" which the team accessed through the lagoon and then through a long journey by foot to the *Gberefu* Beach (Figures 6-8). This venue was the point where, during the slave trade period, the waiting ship would collect the captured Africans for transportation to the Americas.

Conclusion

The experience that was gathered from the retreat and excursion is believed to have potential benefits that will doubtless contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the impacts of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Badagry and on Africans in the Diaspora in general.

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Crawford University excursion and in the guided tour of the Badagry Heritage Museum as well as other areas that were visited.

Notes

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Figure 1. Crawford University Team in Badagry. All images courtesy of the authors.



Figure 2. Mr. Peter Mesewaku addressing the Crawford University team at the Badagry Heritage Museum inside the premises.



Figure 3. Mr. Peter Mesewaku addressing the Crawford University team at the Badagry Heritage Museum outside the premises.



Figure 4. Prof. Alaba Simpson at the site of the British cannon in Ahovikoh, Badagry.



Figure 5. Crawford University team member putting on the slave chains at the Badagry Heritage Museum.



Figure 6. Crawford University team on the "The Journey of No Return" to Gberefo.



Figure 7. A member of Crawford University staff on a horse at the beach of the Journey of No Return.



Figure 8. Trek route from the Badagry Lagoon to the Journey of No Return.



Figure 9. Marlon Jackson on a tour of the Badagry Heritage museum with Peter Mesewaku.



Figure 10. From right to left, Prof. Alaba Simpson (Deputy Vice Chancellor), Prof. Reuben Kolo (Vice Chancellor), Prof. J. I Alabi (Visiting Professor), Prof. Gbenga Aladegbola (Coordinator, Badagry Retreat).



Figure 11. The entrance to the slave dungeon exhibit.

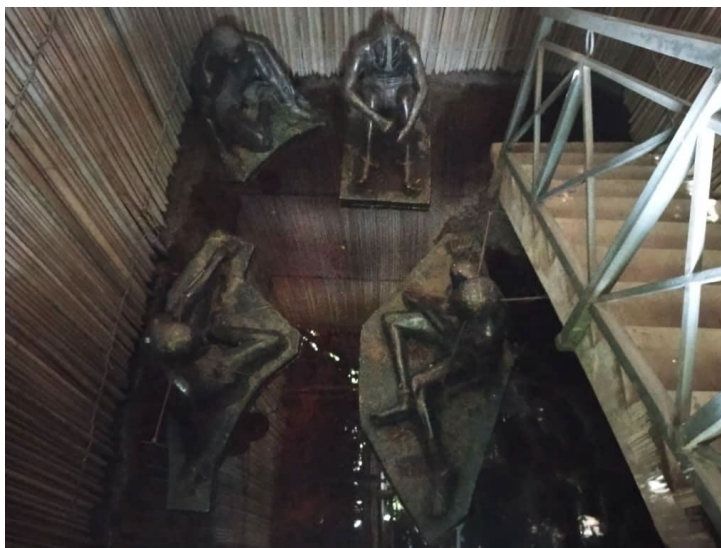


Figure 12. The interior of the slave dungeon exhibit.

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